

AN ENQUIRY INTO THE CONSTRUCTION  
OF CLASSROOM CULTURE:  
THE CASE OF TWO LANGUAGE  
CLASSROOMS IN SINGAPORE

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## ***DECLARATION***

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work  
and of my own execution and ownership.

 Parveen Kaur Sandhu

June 2000



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The first real page of the thesis, but the last to be written. And, oh, to have waited so long! The six years over which this PhD has spanned have offered me a series of psychological, emotional and academic challenges, most of which were experienced with the people whose names I happily list on these pages.

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*to cheji*



*“Where ideal and reality collide is where exploration takes place”*

Thomas Moore





## ***Abstract of Thesis***

This study is an ethnographically-influenced investigation into the ways teachers and students co-construct language classroom culture. Classroom culture is viewed as comprising classroom discourse and action. The everyday interactional discursal practices and actions of teachers and students are cultural practices which on the one hand represent and reflect the culture of the classroom, and on the other make, maintain and develop this culture.

Data is drawn from two multilingual and multicultural Secondary One English language classrooms in the same school in Singapore. These classrooms were selected because one is composed of supposedly more competent language learners than the other. This lends to the study a comparative dimension where data from one classroom is matched against data from the other, allowing for an exploration of similarities and differences that facilitate data interpretation and analysis.

To describe and understand the coming about of classroom culture, a range of data was collected and analysed:

- non-participant observation audio-recordings of 28 lessons, as well as field notes on the physical organisation of the classrooms, non-verbal features of teacher-student interaction, and both pedagogic and non-pedagogic events that occurred during lessons
- interviews with the two teachers, their students, the Principal and key staff
- student questionnaires
- supplementary documentary data in the form of the school diary, school yearbook, and photographs of the two classrooms
- descriptions of the social context of the school (including field notes of daily morning assemblies and weekly school assemblies)

Data analysis was qualitative, and focussed chiefly on classroom observations. Analysis was data driven, and through a process of progressive focusing, led to detailed descriptions of observations and recordings of episodes where teachers:

- explicitly install systems of behaviour (classroom procedure);
- practice discipline and control (classroom management);
- issue procedural instructions

Attention was also given to student questioning behaviour which emerged as a research interest. Interpretation and explanation of observed patterns of classroom discourse and action are proposed using analytical tools such as participant structures, and participant role relationships.

Research findings indicate that both English language classrooms share similar cultural traits, and that these traits mirror the macro social contexts, i.e. the culture in the general education system and that in Singapore society. More interesting and unexpected however, are findings that point at the differences between these microcultures. It appears that the striking differences in microcultures are attributable to the different roles played by the teachers in their attention to classroom procedure, classroom management, and procedural instructions. Teacher differences seem to encourage student questions in one class, and to deter them in the other. In exploring the relationship between classroom interaction and the evolving classroom microculture, this study captures an insider's view of how in one class there is the socialisation of academic success, and in the other, there is the socialisation of failure.

Conclusions are drawn from the study for further research into classroom culture in general and student questioning behaviour in particular. Recommendations are made for pre-service and in-service teacher training which aim at improving the ways in which the education system in Singapore serves society.

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## ***List of Abbreviations***

ATS	Academic task structure
CR	Classroom research
DM	Discipline master
ECA	Extra curricular activity
EL	English language
ELT	English language teaching
GCE	Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education
HOD	Head of department
L1	First language
L2	Second language
LT	Language teaching
MOE	Ministry of Education
OHP	Overhead projector
OHT	Overhead transparency
PSLE	Primary School Leaving Certificate
SL	Second language
SLA	Second language acquisition
SPS	Social participation structure



# Chapter 1. Introduction to Thesis

## 1.1. Introduction

This chapter describes my first encounters with classroom culture, tracing how my experiences as a teacher impacted upon me, and prompted an interest which eventually became the subject of this thesis. The aim of the chapter is to present a history of this inquiry by informing the reader of the evolution of inquiry, from the point of initial interest to execution of investigation.

Interpretive researchers see it as important that a report documents the reflexive nature of the research process by illustrating the development of the researcher's thinking over time, tracing the key issues that emerged as they increased or decreased in importance, revealing how as the inquiry proceeded, it became increasingly focused, and how, as salient elements began to emerge, insights grew (see Ely, 1991:172; Borg, 1997:3; Miles and Huberman 1994: 304). Such a report would show how, through a series of intellectual turning points, external theory appropriate to researcher-interpretations was determined as the study's internal theory began to be grounded in the data collected.

Van Lier proposes that the sequence and process of researching should be reported, including *"false moves, blind alleys, problems encountered along the way and how they were dealt with"* for these *"have much to offer to others about what we have learnt from our mistakes as well as our successes"* (1988:3-4). General interpretive research assumes a cyclical process involving collecting data, conducting data analysis (through which hypotheses are formed), testing hypotheses (through further, more focused data collection), and so on until redundancy is achieved (see Spradley 1979 & 1980). A term more accurate than 'cyclical' may be 'iterative'. Iteration is *"a procedure in which repetition of a sequence of operations yields results successively closer to a desired result or goal"* (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1998). Because of the iterative rather than linear linkage in interpretive research, the structure of an interpretive study looks for a circular connection between research issues, methods, data collection, and interim analyses, as each analysis opens up leads (Miles and Huberman 1994:298). Accordingly, the report structure is composed of a narration of the research process which reflects a more realistic picture of the conduct of research in general. The cyclical or iterative process of data collection and analysis means that the study often

changes directions in terms of the questions being asked and the theoretical perspectives brought to bear on the study, leading to what Davis describes as “*emergent research designs*” (1995:445).

A description of the evolution of inquiry enhances the plausibility of the researcher’s final interpretations as the reader is shown the development of the researcher’s thinking during the course of the study. A reader who understands what was done, why it was done and how it was done, is in a better position to appreciate and evaluate the research project. By tracing the history of inquiry before, during and after fieldwork, this chapter presents an introduction to the thesis.

## **1.2. First Lessons with ‘Classroom Culture’**

Upon obtaining a Diploma-in-Education from the Institute of Education, Singapore, I was posted by the Ministry of Education to Chung Cheng High School (CCHS) to teach English and English Literature. The then 49-year-old school had a history steeped in Confucianism as was made clear to me at the first meeting with the Principal when he told me that, while it was important for his students to learn English, it was more important that they did not lose their ‘Chinese’ identity. He explained, “*We want our students to stay Chinese*”.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the 1300 students spoke Mandarin, or another Chinese language as their first language. My task was to prepare them for the Cambridge General Certificate ‘O’ level English examinations. My students were highly motivated to succeed academically, with most of them keen to continue their education by qualifying for entry into a college or polytechnic. For this, it was essential that they passed their English exams.

I was keen to teach them by putting into practice what I had been taught at teacher training college. I did not understand Mandarin, nor any of the Chinese languages my students spoke. I had myself been educated in Singapore, at a school just a few kilometres away. In its drive to create a nationhood in the form of “*One people, one nation, one Singapore*”<sup>2</sup>, it has been

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<sup>1</sup> It was a common perception among those involved in education that as more Singaporeans spoke more English, they were being ‘westernised’ and losing their Asian values.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase “One people, one nation, one Singapore” is from a Singaporean nationalistic song entitled “One Singapore” which is played on radio and television especially during the build-up to



and still is government policy to emphasise the ‘sameness’ among the three ethnic groups that comprise the country’s population (to be discussed in Chapter 5). Quite naturally, and perhaps as a testament to the effectiveness of this policy, when I became a teacher, my lesson plans and methodology assumed that my students and I were, behind our differing languages and cultures, more similar than different. I taught lessons based on my beliefs and expectations about what should happen in the classroom, and how this should happen, about what constitutes an interesting lesson, what is appropriate behaviour, what are worthy lesson goals etc. I had made assumptions about the rules of the classroom that were, or ought to be, in existence. I never articulated these rules, but I assumed that my students would naturally play by them.

It was a few weeks before I realised that the handouts, transparencies, and enthusiastic lesson presentation were failing to meet with the expected response. I had assumed that when I taught, my students would learn. I was wrong. While I realised that there was a problem, it was only with time that I began to understand how and why my lessons were not as effective as they could have been.

My students had previous learning experiences which had taught them certain classroom behaviour and expectations, and they naturally assumed that our English lessons would be similar to their previous English lessons. However, the methodology I imported into our lessons conflicted with the methodology the students were used to. The following discussion shows how.

### ***1.2.1. Student Behaviour***

As their teacher, I wanted to be approachable so that they would feel comfortable enough to ask questions or seek clarification. There were occasions during lessons when they appeared to be experiencing difficulty carrying out tasks, perhaps because they had not understood my instructions, or they found the task too difficult. Instead of seeking clarification with me, they would keep silent, or would quietly ask their classmates when they had the chance.

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the Republic’s national day celebrations in August, and during election campaigns. The phrase is commonly used as a slogan, seen on banners, national day celebration mementoes, etc.

Generally, these students were unwilling to let me know when they had not understood an explanation, and would only ask a question after careful consideration and deliberation. It took long pauses after my questions and explanations, and constant reassurance on my part that it would be fine if they told me that they had not understood my explanation, before they were forthcoming with questions. They raised their hand to answer a question only when absolutely sure of the answer. There was a general reluctance to volunteer answers during whole-class teaching activities, especially if answers were speculative.

Securing their opinions was also not easy. When asked, they were reluctant to inform me if they would have preferred a different lesson activity to the one we had just done. If and when they told me their preference, they did so via cautiously worded journal<sup>3</sup> entries. During whole-class teaching, there was minimal eye contact as they often spoke with their heads and eyes lowered. During teacher-talk, they generally avoided direct eye contact, leaving me wondering if they were listening to me or if they were perhaps bored. When asked if they had understood an explanation, they would not answer the question. Perhaps they thought it was not necessary to say 'yes' or 'no', and that silence was an appropriate response. Their silence, apart from being frustrating, left me unsure if they had understood what I had just said.

### **1.2.2. Methodology**

The methodology adopted was the one I had been taught at teacher training college, and was based on the tenets of Communicative Teaching. Central to this methodology are pupil involvement (especially through group work), the use of authentic materials, and a focus on message or meaning rather than form.

This methodology however, conflicted with my students' expectations along several dimensions: they seemed keen to focus on form rather than meaning, and appeared to expect to be taught English in the ways they were taught Chinese. They preferred fill-in-the-blank exercises, which had right and wrong answers, and asked for vocabulary lists with attached

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<sup>3</sup> From the beginning of the year, I required each student to keep a journal for English lessons. They had to write an entry every weekend and to hand it in on Monday mornings. They could write on anything, including our lessons. I would read their entries without correcting their English. I would however make comments about what they had written, or answer questions they had asked. Common questions were how they could improve their English, what they should do with a difficult friendship, etc.

word-meanings to memorise, so that they could study the lists and be tested on them. Their preference for rote-memorisation, and the ensuing avoidance of more open-ended and creative work, conflicted with my attempts to encourage them to bring their thoughts and opinions into what I hoped would be 'learner-centred' lessons. They appeared confused as to why they were being asked to create when they were novices whose role was to learn through imitation.

On my part, fresh from teacher training, I had not stopped to consider if I was applying appropriate methodology to context. Communicative teaching, ELT's much touted methodology, was all the rage. I had simply assumed that it would be the most effective way to teach.

### **1.2.3. Materials**

Believing it important to bring the outside world into the classroom so as to generate learner interest, my lessons often made use of authentic materials in the form of newspaper articles, popular music, television programmes, magazine advertisements etc.

The students however preferred the textbook, and expected our lessons to make maximum use of them. I know this because, as the year progressed and they saw that we were not using the textbook for every lesson, they were disappointed, and eventually said as much when they asked me why we were not making more use of the text. The book was divided into theme-based units, and we were doing only some sections of each unit. They asked if we could do all. They referred to their text as an authority, and were clearly used to the orderliness that going through it systematically (from beginning to end) brought to their lessons.

### **1.2.4. Task**

Our lessons often involved group work, requiring students to express their opinions, and to support them with reasoned argument. The aim of group tasks was to encourage personal involvement, so as to increase motivation to use the language. Groups were presented with problems that they had to find solutions to, and present to the class. At the end of such lessons, students often asked me if their group had arrived at the right answer, or at least at

the best answer (compared to other groups). Their disappointment when I told them that there was no one 'correct' or 'best' answer revealed that they saw it as an important part of the task to arrive at the right and best answer.

Later, as the year progressed, some journal entries described group discussions as "*a waste of time*" and not worth having for they did not lead to a right or wrong answer. Students explained that they could learn more from the teacher than from each other. The teacher and what s/he had to say were more important than their classmates' opinions, and they preferred lessons which were teacher-led.

### **1.2.5. Classroom organisation**

I asked students to arrange their desks into groups of four or five so as to facilitate group work. I also moved the teacher's table from centre front position to a corner at the front of the classroom. I wanted the table out of the way as during lessons I rarely sat at the table, preferring instead to move from group to group, or to circulate amongst students.

The students found this somewhat unusual - at one point late in the school year, a student asked me why I was always moving and not sitting at the teacher's desk. This indicated that they viewed it as important for the teacher to be stationary and therefore easily locatable. Regarding having to sit in groups - later in the year, some students wrote, again in their journals, of their preference to sit individually, instead of in groups as the latter promotes idle talk amongst students.

## **1.3. Mismatches in Teacher and Student Behaviours and Expectations**

### **1.3.1. Recognising Cultural Differences**

I have discussed the Chung Cheng experience in considerable detail to illustrate the different ways in which my students and I behaved in the classroom. Our behaviour stemmed from different expectations regarding what should happen in the classroom, and how these should happen. My expectations were never articulated, presumably because I thought this was

unnecessary as I had assumed the students held similar expectations. Yet, as teacher, it was my expectations and values that acted as the currency through which the business of teaching was carried out. These expectations were invisible obstacles in the classroom, obstructing learning. These students were faced with the dual task of having to learn English, and having to learn how to learn English *my* way.

This situation was not helped by the fact that they generally did not question me about what we were doing. Instead, they sat quietly, and allowed me to continue doing the lesson my way. There were more obvious indicators of our differing expectations, as seen in the following example.

When we encountered each other outside the classroom along a corridor, in the canteen, etc., students would say my name as they walked past me. I would stop thinking they wanted to speak with me. They, however, would carry on walking, leaving me puzzling over what had just happened. When this happened repeatedly, I was annoyed. It was nevertheless somewhat reassuring to notice that it happened with other teachers as well.

I later learnt that this was not meant to annoy me. It is a traditional Chinese custom – a manner in which the junior or younger person greets the elder or more senior. It serves to demonstrate respect by acknowledging the authority of the more senior. The students were transferring their behaviour at home to the school setting. This became clear to me only when I read their narrative compositions in which they often described episodes such as “*calling their father’s name*” upon seeing their father first thing in the morning. The students were therefore being respectful while I wondered if they were behaving rudely. Their actions were manifestations of an underlying code of conduct, what Young refers to as the “*culture of the learners*”:

“The culture of the learners, which I take to mean the meanings which those learners assign to events in which they are participants, derives from the culture of the communities in which they grow up, and is influenced by the roles which members of that community expect learners to take. On the other hand, the interpretations which teachers place on the events in which they are co-participants with their students may in some cases differ from the interpretations placed on the same events by the students, and the resulting misunderstandings may cause serious educational problems.”

Young (1987:15)

Recognising our cultural differences meant seeing my students and myself as cultural products. This self-awareness was my first step away from an ethnocentric perspective of the world. It was a full realisation of how we are all culture-bound, and that there is *no* one way of seeing, believing or doing. I saw myself clearer, and what I needed was an understanding of who my students were.

### **1.3.2. Understanding Students as Cultural Products**

In "*What the learner brings: a bridge or barrier. The case of Chinese students learning English*", Cortazzi and Jin (1994) report on their study involving 135 Chinese postgraduate students and their British supervisors. Supervisors and students were interviewed to elicit what each expected of the other; what each thought the ideal other was; how satisfied each was with the way in which the other played out his/her role; etc. It was found that both parties had different expectations of the teaching/learning situation. As these expectations had not been made explicit, each side did not know what the other expected of them. There was frustration because expectations had not been met, and little understanding of the situation. The end result was that insufficient mutual understanding often led to strained relationships between the students and their supervisors.

The students described in the study seemed, to a large extent, to share a view common of the Chinese in general, a view which is strongly influenced by the Chinese philosophies of Confucianism and Taoism. Cortazzi and Jin drew on these philosophies to help explain the mental make-up of the Chinese student, and what motivates him/her to achieve, to behave in certain ways etc.:

- The Chinese believe that truth is objective and exists apart from the individual. It is out there, waiting to be learnt. Education imparts truth. Within Confucianism there is a deep respect for education, for its ability to mould a person into an educated man, as well as for the economic rewards it can bring.
- Control is viewed as essential for without appropriate direction from the top, society, or the group falls apart. The teacher is therefore expected to occupy centre position in the classroom. As a student, you listen carefully to what the teacher says for learning



happens when you listen to the teacher. It follows that talking during lessons, especially if it is non-task-focused talk during group work, takes away valuable learning time. It is also disrespectful to the teacher who is seen as someone who commands respect by virtue of his/her position as centre of knowledge and learning, and whose (wise) words are to be absorbed.

- The teacher is the active shaper of the lesson while the student is the more passive recipient of learning. Teacher and students share a more formal relationship, with the student questioning the teacher only after careful consideration. To ask a question in class is to risk revealing a lack of knowledge, and to volunteer an answer during class discussions when one is not sure of the answer is to risk losing one's face. It is also inconsiderate to one's classmates to waste the group's precious lesson time.
- The textbook and what it has to say are treated with respect. It provides a focus and a clear structure to the lesson, and its use should be maximised, preferably systematically, from front to back, beginning to end.
- As education is equated with careful shaping and moulding, in real terms, this means students expect to be drilled and pushed, and to have performance demanded of them. Homework must be done for it helps students to learn. A good student pays attention to the teacher, does homework, participates in task-focussed talk, and studies for tests. A student who learns well will be rewarded first by the school system and later, by society. Tests and exams offer you the chance to find out how much you have learnt, and show how good a learner you are. If you have tried hard enough, you will fare well in them.

Maley (1986) sees the Chinese culture as one that is generally driven by its traditions, which are highly regarded by its people. Students, seeing both teacher and text as holders of knowledge, believe that in order to acquire knowledge, they must commit it to memory. Because traditions are highly regarded, students find it difficult to manage assignments which require them to be creative. They are not masters, and so cannot create *yet*.

In her doctoral thesis *"Academic Cultural Expectations and Second Language Use: Chinese Postgraduate Students in the UK"*, Jin analyses these students, and explains how their culture of learning, depending on how it is utilised, could serve as a bridge or barrier, in the education environment. If left out of the equation of teaching, it becomes a barrier, and

learning is impeded, or may not occur at all. If, on the other hand, it is harnessed and incorporated into methodology, then it becomes a bridge that serves teaching.

“Traditionally, learning has been seen as a reflex of teaching, the action of the teacher as requiring a corresponding reaction on the part of the learner.”

Malamah-Thomas (1987:vii)

My teaching assumed this – I believed that because I taught, students would learn. However, experience taught me that, as dominant as a teacher may be, s/he cannot guarantee learning, and that the reality is that *teaching* is the subservient activity, accountable entirely to its effect on learning. Van Lier (1988:32) aptly cautions that:

“we must always remember that teaching never causes learning, but rather creates (or fails to create) the conditions in which learning can occur.”

With hindsight, had I been more sensitive to student behaviour and expectations, disappointment and frustrations on both sides could have been minimised. More learning could have happened more smoothly. I learnt that language teaching is not a neutral activity, and that what happens in the classroom rests on certain beliefs about language teaching, about appropriate behaviour in the classroom, and about respect for authority (in the form of education, the teacher, the book, etc.). These beliefs derive from the wider socio-cultural context of the school, family and society.

The teaching experience was an eye-opener, bringing to the surface my own beliefs and expectations regarding teaching. As I became more aware of myself as a cultural product, I understood my students better. Conversely, the more I understood them, the better I knew myself. It is only in knowing another that we come to know our self.

#### **1.4. Identification of Research Interest**

My teaching experience made me aware of how expectations of teachers and learners regarding what happens in the classroom can vary. How lessons are organised by the teacher; how students behave as they learn; what constitutes acceptable behaviour; etc., vary amongst the participants of the class group. Let us refer to the (usually implicit) rules on which the lessons are based as the *‘culture of the classroom’* or classroom culture. This culture is not



an instant culture which arrives with the classroom. Neither is it installed by the teacher. It comes into existence in some form, however tentative, when individuals first meet as a class group. It is negotiated by teacher and students. Never rigid, it continues to be negotiated over time, sensitive and responsive to the actions of members of the class.

By saying that classroom culture is negotiated and co-created, one conveys the idea that teachers and learners are equal in their powers to influence classroom culture. Yet, in teacher-centred classrooms around the world, it is often the teacher who plays the central role in shaping the classroom culture through setting the rules. In a context where the teacher is regarded as an authority figure not to be questioned or challenged, I was in a powerful position to shape the culture of the classroom. Yet, while this was potentially possible, the reality was different. I taught my students in ways they had not experienced before. They tried to cope with my lessons, with having to be the kinds of learners that the lessons assumed they were. But because we were operating on two rather different, if not contrasting, notions of how I should teach and they should learn, our lessons were riddled with hiccups, some more transparent than others.

Over time, it became clear that it should not be me alone who decided on what happened and how this happened in the classroom. In fact, because the students were generally homogeneous in their behaviour and expectations, and because these behaviour and expectations were consistent with those of the wider context (CCHS had played a central role in shaping its students' culture of learning), my position as a key shaper of classroom culture was significantly weaker than might have been expected.

One of the more insightful lessons gained from the CCHS experience was the importance of the learners' behaviour and expectations to the experience of everyday lessons. ELT is composed of a sea of methodologies, and methodologies are based on assumptions about classroom culture. For an adopted methodology to be effective, it has to be compatible with the culture of the classroom. I imported Communicative Teaching methodology, as it was what I had been taught during teacher training. But because of its incompatibility with student needs and expectations and the context, teaching was less effective. The immediate demands of the context is stronger than a methodology imported from elsewhere in suggesting the norms and routines through which teaching English should occur.

Four years later, I wrote a dissertation for a Masters degree based on this experience. Entitled "*Cultural Imposition in the ESL Classroom*", it addressed my experience academically, beginning with how I had imposed my culture on my students, before considering other ways in which ELT can impose on students' culture. When I decided to carry out research for a doctorate degree, it was because I wished to explore the coming together of classroom culture in an EL classroom, where language is both medium and content of the lesson. The classroom world revolves around behaviour, physical as well as linguistic. I planned to study how teachers and students co-construct "*a set of norms which govern teaching and learning activity in the classroom*" (Wright 1992:108). These norms give rise to patterns in classroom life, and norms and patterns constitute the culture of the classroom.

### **1.5. An Emergent Research Design**

Working with culture as a concept is problematic as it encompasses a vastness and an open-endedness, making it difficult to define and even more difficult to study in a systematic and meaningful manner. I began by reading up on culture in general, and culture in the classroom in particular. Books ranged from Geertz (1973), Jackson (1968), Heath (1983), Wright (1992), Holliday (1994), Allwright, (1996) etc. Within Applied Linguistics itself there is relatively little on the subject, and so although constructs like classroom culture are commonly used, definitions are difficult to locate. It gradually unfolded that the field I was interested in lay at the point where (Applied) Linguistics, Sociology, Anthropology and Education over-lap, and could be described as 'language in the classroom' or 'educational linguistics'.

Through my readings, I understood that to study classroom culture, I would have to adopt a research methodology that would be able to cope with the breadth and width of the concept of culture. It was also important that the methodology allowed for open-endedness such that the study would be data-driven. It would be the data itself that would focus the investigation. Works which played a significant role in influencing the methodological approach of the study were those by Erickson (1986), Stake (1995), Pierce (1995a and 1995b). The methodology thus adopted defines the study as an ethnographically-influenced, interpretive study.

The research design eventually led me to conduct fieldwork in two classrooms in a school in Singapore. Data collection took place over three months, a time-span that allowed for on-site analysis and subsequent (on-site) modifications of the research design. The specifics of the fieldwork context rendered certain aspects of the design unworkable. Whilst I had expected this, I was not prepared for the extent to which the design had to be altered, just as I was unprepared for the amount of difficulty I would have negotiating access to a school. Eventually, the study was guided by an emergent research design as solutions to on-site realities were found, and problems and obstacles to data collection were worked around.

While the general area of interest remained classroom culture, on-site data analysis led to the study acquiring unexpected foci in the form of student questioning behaviour. This caught my attention during initial lesson observations and impressionistic analyses of lesson recordings. Data collection became more focused as interview topics were modified, and a questionnaire was drawn up to include sections that explored issues related to student questioning behaviour. This was done both as a means of collecting more evidence, and as a means of data triangulation.

Away from the fieldwork context, back at the desk, the task was to analyse data so as to generate interpretations and identify patterns. I began with the process of familiarising myself with the mass of data as I sought and contemplated an appropriate method of analysis. I needed a method that would be broad enough to manage the concept of classroom culture, yet be detailed enough to deal with specific classroom interactions. I was tempted to explore aspects of classroom discourse in finer detail, but when I did, I found it difficult to keep the larger classroom culture in sight. The more I focused on detail, the more the larger picture faded from view. A balance had to be struck.

The issue of student questioning behaviour that had attracted my attention during data collection remained a research focus. However, with more detailed analysis, I identified three larger research areas. These were the:

- explicit setting-up of classroom procedure;
- nature of classroom management;
- and delivery of teacher instructions.

They were recurring features of classroom interaction, and seemed to be important in influencing English lessons to be more, or less effective. I looked at student questioning behaviour within each of these. Together, they signalled the cultures of the two classrooms, and were consequently viewed as important enough to provide the study with its direction.

At this point, after having analysed lesson observation data and identified patterns, I needed to formulate a system for the presentation of data and data interpretations. Given the breadth of material collected, this was a hugely challenging task. While the initial data gathering nets had been thrown far and wide with the intention of collecting data on as wide a front as possible, as the study acquired its focus with the emergence of issues belonging to the case (or classroom) instead of those that I may have arrived with, a large portion of collected data had to be excluded. There were problems deciding what to include, and where exactly to set the boundaries of the study. Only when these were finally determined (this occurred well into data analysis) was I able to outline with confidence the focus of the study.

At the beginning of the research project in 1995, the broad aim was to study the coming about of culture in the classroom, to show how teachers and learners co-construct classroom culture. During data collection, the focus was more specific: I wanted to study how, in the two classrooms, the teacher, students, and the macro social context (which includes the school and community) gave rise to the culture of the classroom. Having observed how these cultures varied, I looked closer to understand and explain differences, and explored the links between the micro and macro social contexts. The questions that guide the study are as follows:

- How are the classroom microcultures similar, and how are they different?
- How do the ways in which the teachers install classroom procedure, practice classroom management, and deliver procedural instructions shape the microculture of the classroom?

And as a sub-question to this:

How do the ways in which teachers install classroom procedure, practice classroom management, and deliver procedural instructions affect student questioning behaviour?

In seeking answers to these questions, I hope to throw some light on the larger question of how these microcultures are shaped, sustained and altered in daily classroom interactions.

## 1.6. Outline of Thesis

A strong element in the structure of this thesis is the narration of the research process, which aims to reflect a more realistic picture of how the study was conducted. Along with the main text reporting the study is a parallel text that reports on the study's major intellectual turning points and the progressive focusing of research issues. In its structure, particularly in the chapters on data analysis (Chapters Six - Eight), the thesis tries as much as possible to be true to the path the study followed, and to reflect the chronological unfolding of events as they occurred.

The thesis is made up of nine chapters. In the chapter that follows, I review the literature and present the theoretical and conceptual framework within which the study is set. The chapter begins with a discussion of classroom research in general education and in language classrooms, before looking more specifically at the concept of classroom culture. I consider the key role of discourse within constitutive ethnography and microethnography, as I outline how I plan to study classroom culture. Chapter Three begins with a theoretical consideration of salient methodology issues before presenting a description of the overall orientation of the research methodology. Chapter Four outlines the research design, and presents a discussion of its key features. A major part of the chapter describes the processes of data collection and data analysis. Chapter Five locates the study by describing the macro social contexts. It begins with descriptions of the larger social context of Singapore and the Singapore education system, before describing the context of the school itself. Chapter Six takes the reader into the two classrooms, in search of emergent research issues. It provides descriptions and analyses of the first lesson observed in each class. In doing this, it presents the tone of the new microcultures and identifies initial research issues. Chapter Seven illustrates these emergent research issues using data extracted from lesson observations. Chapter Eight assembles a collage that portrays the microculture of each classroom, and draws on interview and student questionnaire data to collate frames of references for teachers and students. These frames along with theoretical concepts of the field are used to explain teacher-student interactions and the microculture of each class. Explanations are also drawn from the larger macro culture (as presented in Chapter Five), as I consider how what happens in the classroom is shaped by what occurs in the wider society. Finally, Chapter Nine presents implications and recommendations of the study.



## **Chapter 2. Review of Literature on and around Classroom Culture**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Chapter One presented the reader with a history of inquiry that traced how the circumstances of my initial encounters as a newly trained teacher gave rise to my interest in classroom culture. This chapter addresses the topic of the study by first surveying the field to provide a background of what others have said and done so that I can draw from this what is relevant to the study. The aim is to justify a need for the proposed study in terms of the relevant phenomena it seeks to investigate, and in doing so, to establish a theoretical basis for it. This involves locating it within the on-going dialogue of the larger field, and showing how it can contribute to this field.

I begin with a general introduction to research in education, before focusing on a review of research pertaining to language use in language classrooms. I look in particular at classroom process research, first describing what has been done, then providing an assessment of the field, which identifies areas that need greater attention. 'Classroom culture' is identified as one such area. I consider how research in this area could increase our understanding of what happens in classrooms in general and the English Language classroom in particular. This is then followed by a review of how others have studied classroom culture and of how they argue for more research into this area. The chapter ends with an outline of the central research issue which supplies the study with its topic, and determines its adopted methodology, to be discussed in Chapter Three.

### **2.2. Locating the study**

The area of second-language research is relatively young and consequently still somewhat amorphous in terms of its evolution and directions. Only in recent years has it begun to acquire a more defined structure that allows a researcher to see how a study fits in with other studies (both present and past), and how it contributes to the dialogue of wider research. The chapter has been divided into sections, each of which characterises what this study is and is not about, in order to locate it in relation to those that came before it, and to those in its



immediate and neighbouring fields. On the broadest level, the study looks at research in education. More specifically, it focuses on the teaching and learning of a second language (SL research) in classrooms (classroom-centred research). The study concerns itself with classroom processes (classroom process research). These define the first half of the chapter, and form the platform on which the key concept of classroom culture can then be discussed.

## 2.3. Research in Education

In the preface to his collection of essays, *'Life in Classrooms'*, Jackson writes that

“Classroom life, in my judgement, is too complex an affair to be viewed or talked about from any single perspective.” (1968:vii)

This complexity has attracted to the classroom researchers from a diverse range of disciplines which include sociology, anthropology, social psychology, communicative ethnography, educational research and curriculum management. Although these various traditions have over the years evolved their own research tools to investigate classroom life, they are however, united by their general motivation to make teaching more effective.

None of these disciplines has the capacity to singularly decode what happens in the classroom. Even within disciplines, differing perspectives focus on and present different facets of the classroom, some complementing, others competing, with each other. As a natural response to the complexity that Jackson refers to, researchers in classrooms have had to be selective about both what they study, and how they study it. As “*there is no telling it as it is*” (Stenhouse, in Allwright, 1988:x), only through adopting a community approach can we unravel what happens in the classroom. This implies that to study what happens in the classroom, researchers have to adopt an approach that accommodates interests and shares power so that, together, researchers come closer to *telling it as it is*.

Edwards and Mercer (1987), examining research in educational settings, outline three main orientations. They are the educational, the sociological, and the psychological. Together, these research orientations employ the use of observation, surveys, ethnography, and psychometric experiments to investigate the classroom. As a consequence of different research following different orientations, today there is



“no simple or singular way in which we could characterise the nature of classrooms, the ways in which classrooms are influenced by broad social processes, or their contributions to learning and education”  
Wright (1992: 31)

Modern classroom-centred research began in the fifties among teacher trainers, and arose as a response to the need to provide student teachers with sufficient feedback on their teaching. Teacher trainers commenting on trainees' lessons needed observation schedules on which to base their observations. This aside, they needed proof as to what constitutes effective teaching so that they would then be able to incorporate their findings into teacher training programmes. Their goal was the prescription of ideal classroom practices for teachers in training. However, in attempting to define effective teaching, educational researchers found classroom behaviour too complex to be neatly divided into categories such that

“what constitutes effective teaching has proved so complex in itself, and so fascinating a research problem that teacher training has slipped progressively into the background as an immediate concern”  
Allwright (1983:194).

A consequence of this is that instead of trying to arrive at principles of effective teaching to teach to trainee teachers, educational researchers shifted their attention to unravelling the enormous complexities of classroom behaviour. The research goal shifted from wanting to prescribe effective teaching to aiming to describe what happens in the classroom. Within this descriptive tradition, there arose a range of approaches, some more purely descriptive than others. These include the ethnographic work of Jackson (1968), and the observational tradition of classroom interaction analysis initiated by Flanders (1960).

Concentrating only on descriptive classroom research over the years, Cazden (1986) differentiates various strands that emerged in the US and in the UK. In the US was an offshoot of the ethnography of communication (see Gumperz and Hymes, 1972) which led to contrastive sociolinguistic research looking at home-school differences in language use. In the UK, there was the work of teachers in education (Barnes et.al 1971); the work within 'new sociology of education', looking at how social inequalities are (re) produced within the school (Karabel and Halsey, 1976); the work of linguists Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) hoping to develop a comprehensive scheme for the analysis of discourse by starting with the classroom; and finally, the work of educational researchers believing that an approach

combining ethnography and linguistics could contribute to the study of classroom talk (see Stubbs and Delamont, 1983). These as well as the tradition of ethnographic studies in British schools, see Woods (1979) and Hammersley (1983) has added considerably to our knowledge of educational processes because they seek to understand these processes from the participants' (which may or may not be that of the researcher's) point of view.

## **2.4. Research in Second Language Classrooms**

A specific subject focus within language classroom research addresses this question:

“What connections can be drawn between patterns of observed interaction and classroom talk with the process of language acquisition in the learner? This is, after all, what interests teachers, what should interest second language acquisition researchers and what should suggest modifications to classroom practice.” (Allwright, 1988:x)

Both in the historical evolution of language CR and general education research the quest for more effective teacher training led invariably to the search for the best method to prescribe. Within the language classroom, language functions as both the medium and the content of the lesson. Teaching methodology therefore becomes more significant as it plays a key role in defining what the language lesson will be like. As such language teaching differs from the teaching of other subjects as it has a number of labelled methods to concern itself with, as well as the wish to select among these methods. This caused the investigation into methodological superiority to become a compelling goal of language CR in the fifties.

It was an era of increasing optimism about the capabilities of science and technology. Filtering into the field of language CR, this new ethos brought an imperative to devise empirical studies which would prove scientifically how one method was superior to another. The two competing methodologies of the day were ‘audiolingualism’ and the ‘cognitive code’ methods. Researchers conducting these empirical studies adopted a positivistic faith, believing in both observation and measurement. The measuring devices, originally borrowed from general education research, were modified to suit the complexities of language teaching. Measurements were usually of learner behaviour, in the form of test results, which were then co-related with classroom events or classroom interaction, measured in the form of observation schedules (Allwright, 1988). Unfortunately, for methodologists, major experiments conducted in the sixties to decide which method was to be advocated (see

especially Scherer and Wertheimer, 1964; Otto 1969) proved inconclusive at best, if not simply invalid. The ultimate loser was neither the audiolingual method nor the cognitive code method, but the very notion of global methodological prescriptions.

Thus, after a decade, language teaching specialists gave up their futile search for the 'right' method. The alternative to methodological comparisons was to be found in general education work which, having established that methodological comparisons were doomed to be unproductive, was using observation as a key procedure in the investigation into teaching styles in the hope of being able to find one that was the most effective (see Flanders 1960). Ultimately, this too was prescriptive in intent, but now the research focus was not on telling teachers which method to use for an experimental period, but on producing detailed studies of actual classroom behaviour, and on relating aspects of teacher behaviour directly to learning outcomes, regardless of the method employed (Allwright, 1988). There was an increasing interest in what actually happens in language classrooms, as opposed to what people think happens. Researchers turned to

“recording, transcribing and analysing what actually goes on between teachers and learners in the classroom as a first step towards articulating principles for language learning and teaching.”  
Nunan (1989:97)

The consequence of this was that methodological comparisons were discontinued in favour of either comparative studies at the level of teaching technique, or of more purely descriptive studies. Politzer published his empirical study in 1970, which was designed to distinguish between good and bad teaching behaviours. The study, comparing how teaching techniques related with learner achievements, led to strong evidence that small-scale research at the level of technique was not ready to support a prescriptive approach to teacher training. He concluded that there is not yet a situation where teacher trainers can, and with a confidence born of a background of solid experimental results, tell their trainees which techniques to use and which not to use. Politzer saw that

“the very high complexity of the teaching process makes it very difficult to talk in absolute terms about ‘bad’ and ‘good’ teaching devices”  
(1970:42).

This means that having already retreated from method to technique, language teaching research had now to retreat yet another step further. In fact, looking at the origins of

language teaching research and tracing how its issues of concern have developed, we see that it has been a move away from more traditional concerns regarding determining the 'best' method, and that it has been a retreat from a somewhat simplistic optimism as to what constitutes good language teaching, towards more fundamental research which looks at areas like classroom interaction processes (Allwright, 1983:201). Researchers arrived at the point where they aimed to describe rather than prescribe. And the focus of what happens in the classroom was no longer teaching techniques but classroom processes.

These changes were gradual and have resulted in the simultaneous emergence of various strands of research traditions within applied linguistics since the late seventies. These traditions are the consequence of particular philosophical and theoretical orientations that have been consciously and unconsciously adopted. These traditions have led to the development of a number of parallel research movements that have tended to remain separate, rather than inform the field as a whole. Two such areas of study are firstly, those which determine how teaching processes relate to desired outcomes such as student achievement (process-product research), and secondly, those which attempt to describe or define what happens in the classroom (descriptive research). A discussion of each follows.

#### ***2.4.1. General Trends in Language Learning Research:***

##### **a) Process-product Research**

According to Cazden (1986:432), this area of research, first referred to as 'process-product research' by Dunkin and Biddle (1974), has come to dominate research on teaching and has been viewed as more mainstream research within education since the 1960s. Often referred to as 'positivist approach', it adopts an applied natural science model for research and development that assumes that what is

"generic across classrooms will emerge across studies, and that the subtle variations across classrooms are trivial and can be washed out of the analysis as error variance"

(Erickson 1986:131).

True to its positivist origins, it is an approach that searches for an increasingly specific look at causal linkages between, for example, teacher effectiveness (often measured by end-of-the-year student scores on standardised achievement tests) and particular teaching practices.

The end goal of this approach is the prescription of ideal classroom practices for trainee teachers. To monitor and record teaching practices, classroom researchers working within this approach employ observational schedules that include pre-specified categories used systematically so that uniformity of observation (or reliability) across times of observation in the same classroom and across different classrooms is assured (Erickson 1986:131).

Within this approach is the area of study known as SLA (second language acquisition), which draws upon the use of research techniques and philosophy dominant in the social sciences, particularly psychology, to create a descriptive model of language learning. In adopting psychological models for explaining how language use is acquired, researchers within this field see language learning as a mental process, and employ a range of research techniques (such as case studies and elicitation techniques) to study the mental strategies used by language learners to acquire a language (Davis 1995:428). Language oriented researchers look at the classroom as a setting for language acquisition and learning in terms of the language input provided by the teacher and the language output supplied by the students. This view, focusing particularly on teacher-talk, has brought us to what is today the mainstream of second language acquisition research, where the *"hunt is on for the crucial variables, and one of the prime candidates is input"* (Allwright, 1983:199), and where the focus is on the *"rate and route"* of development (Ellis, 1985:1995).

By the early 1980s, SLA research had become mainstream applied linguistics as it adopted the psychological research trend toward statistical analyses based on what are broadly called logical-positivistic approaches (see Davis 1995:428). These approaches investigate social phenomena by looking into facts, searching for causes. Researchers operate within quasi-experimental and experimental research paradigms and designs, which seek to control human and other extraneous variables to gain what is considered objective, reliable, and hard data as well as replicable findings. The aim is to use the findings of investigations into the appropriateness of tests and methods to generalise beyond the individuals participating in the study to those throughout the population from which the sample was drawn. The causal thinking prevalent in experimental psychology underpins much research within this tradition.

SLA has long tended to the quantitative side of the quantitative-qualitative divide (Chaudron, 1988; Allwright, 1988; van Lier, 1988), searching for hard evidence of learning having taken place, or input being taken up, or instruction of different types being successful or otherwise in promoting uptake among learners. However, its use of naturally occurring data has been

selective, and is usually restricted to de-contextualized examples from a data corpus (Wright 1992:46). When samples of classroom language are referred to (see for example the works addressed in Faerch and Kasper (1983), they are viewed as products of learning, to be categorised into a typology of strategies, and in this way, used as indicators of language proficiency. Classroom talk is thus treated as products of learning, not as part of classroom processes. In fact, only relatively recently has classroom processes been looked at within SLA (see for example Pica's (1987) account of SLA in classroom circumstances).

In "*The Role of Practise in Classroom Language Learning*", Ellis (1988) discusses how researchers view the role of controlled practice within language learning, and how this view or theoretical orientation affects their findings. He argues that when we, as researchers, see practice as a social event involving personal involvement on the part of the learner, we no longer adopt the narrow focus of establishing a causative link between practise and learning. Ellis argues that classroom processes play an important role in language learning, and that they can be accessed for investigation through an analysis of classroom routines, such as controlled practice.

It was possibly never the aim of SLA research to provide all the answers to questions asked by language researchers. However, within this field,

"the social and cultural aspects of language acquisition generally have been viewed as distant from the mental processes of language acquisition and thus of less importance theoretically or for explanatory purposes" Davis (1995:430).

This is seen in the dearth of socially situated SLA studies. The classroom, when actually used as a research site, has been used for its convenience in order to verify SLA theory, rather than as a site worthy of investigation in its own right. SLA research, in fostering what is in some respects a fundamentally asocial view of language acquisition, has not addressed the classroom as a social context (see Breen 1985, Allwright, 1988).

Separate from SLA, is another area of study which represents a major trend within classroom process research. Classroom discourse research is discussed at this point because, while it does not fall neatly within the domain of process-product research covered in this section, it does share some of the features, especially in terms of its 'asocial-ness', of general SLA research.



As an overall and ultimate goal, classroom discourse analysis seeks to understand how the classroom works as a learning environment by analysing how language is used to structure that environment. The first step towards arriving at such an understanding involves describing classroom discourse. Working within L1 elementary classrooms, Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) study represents a comprehensive attempt to conceptualise classroom linguistic interaction. They develop a rigorous descriptive framework (which sees classroom interaction as a system of hierarchically structured ranks) and in doing so, their study describes classroom discourse but does not explain it. Sinclair and Coulthard's work has strongly influenced subsequent classroom discourse research, which generally continues to describe rather than build an understanding of the processes that create discourse.

Classroom research in L2 (second language) settings has yet to come up with an integrated discursial analytical system that compares to that of Sinclair and Coulthard, due perhaps to the complexity of understanding interaction in an environment where language is both vehicle (means of communication) and object (purpose of instruction). L2 research has instead proceeded by examining specific aspects of classroom discourse to produce a better understanding of the dynamics of verbal communication. Five areas of such research are:

- the analysis of teacher talk
- the analysis of error treatment
- the analysis of teacher questions
- the participation of learners in classroom discourse
- the relationship between learning task and interaction.

The strong slant within classroom discourse research to produce descriptions instead of explanations led Mitchell to note that description has in fact been the principal achievement of classroom process research (1985:346), and to encourage researchers to move beyond description, and to produce explanations of the processes they identify and describe. Only through seeking to explain processes can such research correct its asocial bias and include both the participants and context into its analysis. While some studies do make an attempt to correct this bias (see Slimani 1989; Tsui Bik-may 1987), Wright criticises studies within classroom discourse research for being

“fundamentally descriptive in nature, seeking to examine the effects of teaching on learners. They thus fall into the mainstream of second language classroom research that aims to identify ‘good teaching’ in the transcripts of the lessons.” (1992:49)

Like SLA research, these studies examine the products of interaction between teachers, learners and teaching materials without accounting for processes. There appears to be an assumption that the products of discourse are, in themselves, sufficient to account for social processes. While these studies draw on naturally-occurring classroom language for their data, lesson transcripts do not in themselves provide sufficient evidence in terms of an explanation of the nature of the forces in operation in the lesson that create them.

## **b) Descriptive Research**

Addressing the need to approach language learning research from a social point of view is the second area of study where research attempts to describe or define what happens in the classroom. This field draws many of its concepts and approaches from descriptive CR within general education as practised by Hymes (1972), Barnes et al. (1971), Woods (1979), Hammersley (1983) et al. (see section 2.3 above). As a group, these studies are often referred to as descriptive, or interpretive, or qualitative CR. Research in this area is increasing, attracting researchers such as linguists, psychologists, anthropologists and sociologists to the classroom. Generally, these researchers view education and learning from a sociological perspective, studying the language lesson as a socially-constructed event, the product of the interactive work of all the individuals present. Work in this field ranges from looking specifically at how participants interact in the classroom to collectively produce, or not produce as the case may be, learning opportunities, to broader studies within language socialisation which look at the interaction between micro and macro aspects of classroom behaviour. This involves looking at internal aspects (social and pedagogical behaviour within the classroom) and at how these interact with external aspects (i.e. the world outside the classroom).

The aim in this approach is to provide descriptions, followed by explanation, rather than to categorise for statistical analyses overt verbal communication. It attempts to look for underlying meanings of both verbal and non-verbal features of communication, and this involves recovering social assumptions which underlie the communication process. According to Gumperz and Hymes (1972) we need to know social values associated with



activities, social categories and social relationships implied in the message in order to understand the situated meaning of a message, i.e. its interpretation in a particular context. Data collection would therefore need to go beyond the linguistic, to include descriptive information on social and contextual cues within which interactions take place.

An area of research that addresses language learning from a social perspective, is sociolinguistics, which focuses on the social aspects of language use, encompassing a broad range of theoretical concepts and research techniques drawn from diverse but related sources such as linguistics, ethnography, anthropology, sociology, discourse analysis, dialectology, psychology, pragmatics, stylistics, language planning, etc. Included within the domain of sociolinguistics is the area of ethnography of communication. Developed during the 1970s, this area of study focuses on the social meaning of language within the context of particular groups or cultures. What is unique about this field of research is that it includes not just social but cultural considerations too, and in so doing, it employs the use of ethnographic methods in the study of language acquisition. Linguistic anthropologists such as Scollon and Scollon (1981) conducted ethnographic studies of child socialisation into language within diverse cultural settings.

As informative as these studies are, the information produced by them has, unfortunately, generally not filtered into language learning research, remaining instead within the field of education (see Cazden, John and Hymes, 1972). Research developments within these fields however are clearly important and relevant to classroom-based language learning research. In his study of classroom interaction in classrooms in Hawaii, Boggs (1972) investigated why children in the Ania Pumehana Homestead were performing below the national norms although these children were not particularly disadvantaged as a group. Boggs found that there was clearly a lack of fit between attitudes and behaviour patterns of the children and those required by their school. Drawing on similar notions, Heath (1983) produced her classic study of language socialisation within an American community. Her study, which entailed a decade of fieldwork, suggests that children from communities where language socialisation patterns are different from those of the mainstream schools experience academic difficulties because of these differences. Based on this theory of academic difficulties stemming from home-school differences, bilingual education researchers began to conduct ethnographic studies comparing the language and social norms of mainstream schools with those of immigrant communities, looking at home-school differences as a

source of school failure. Others have examined the larger socio-political context within which schools and communities function (see Davis, 1995:428-429).

As individuals, we have a repertoire of linguistic codes. Teachers need to know the codes that their students have, along with the meanings associated with these codes. A teacher equipped with the knowledge and understanding of the communicative repertoire of his/her students is better placed to understand them. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) showed how teachers' expectations of a child's performance could have a significant effect on the child's learning. In his study, Baratz (1970) showed how cultural stereotypes such as those relating to a child's different linguistic system can lead to negative teacher attitudes towards the both the child and his language, leading eventually to poor school performance.

These studies demonstrate how much of what happens in the classroom, including how successfully students learn, can only be understood by going beyond the linguistic, into the social and psychological aspects of classroom talk. Hymes (1972) sees it as a scientific principle to stress the importance of the objects of a study in a situation. In the classroom, this translates to the participants in their social context. And as *"before the lesson the learners come from somewhere and after the lesson they go somewhere else"* (van Lier 1988:x), any analysis of classroom language learning must take account of the social facts of classrooms as particular social institutions in which the local contexts of participation must be linked to the broader social forces governing the school.

Thus, while SLA researchers approach the study of classroom interaction by looking at different aspects of classroom interaction such as teacher talk, turn-taking, feedback, error treatment, teacher questions, etc as products of interaction, researchers within the descriptive tradition see these same aspects of classroom interaction as processes.

#### **2.4.2. Recent trends in Language Learning Research**

Most of the early years of language teaching research occurred away and separate from general education research. This was partly because it had its own tradition of subject-specific research (the field of SLA), and allowed its tradition of CR to be dominated by a concern for language teaching method, probably because of the connection between the development of systematic classroom observation and language teacher training, itself method-driven (Allwright, 1996:225).

In recent years, however, researchers have begun to approach the field with a wider conception of what language acquisition entails, as well as a broader view of the language classroom. The classroom is seen as a social microcosm, and what occurs in it is the outcome of the conflict between the social and pedagogic pressures to which its participants are subject (Allwright, 1996). Some of these social pressures can be better understood by referring to the broader society within which the lessons take place. Other pressures arise in the classroom itself and must be studied within this internal culture. Below is a brief outline of the gradual shifts within language teaching research, tracing how it has come to view the classroom as a microcosm of society.

Bellack's analytical system (1966), later modified by Fanselow to form the FOCUS (Foci for Observing Communications Used in Settings) system, marks a shift in the history of language learning research. Unlike Flanders who studied classroom interaction in terms of a limited set of teaching acts - distinguishing between relatively authoritarian and relatively democratic teaching styles, and therefore more or less effective instruction - Bellack's team was much influenced by Wittgenstein's concept of language as essentially a social game. Classroom interaction is a social game, one that is bound by conventions, and consists of an implicitly agreed set of moves by all participants. As such, instead of devising an efficient technology for teacher training, or establishing direct relationships between teaching styles and student learning, Bellack's team tried to understand how the classroom worked as a learning environment, through studying how language was used to structure that environment. It attempts to understand the lesson in terms of teaching cycles. The teacher is seen as the most active player in the game of classroom linguistic behaviour, functioning as initiator of both student-teacher and student-student interaction.

The FOCUS system, used on either live or recorded observations, follows Bellack's view of classroom interaction as a social game. Fanselow adopts the four moves - structuring, soliciting, responding, and reacting (employed by Bellack in his research within L1 instruction) to include two more dimensions - 'medium' and 'use of medium' - in order to describe classroom interaction beyond the limitations caused by pre-determined teacher or learner behaviours (Fanselow, 1977).

Barnes et al., however, interested in the use of language in the classroom, particularly in language used by learners as they learned, published an influential collection of papers

entitled '*Language, the Learner, and the School*'" (1969) in which they proposed neither a particular system of analysis, nor a theory of discourse. They focused instead on persuading teachers to look carefully at what their learners were saying to each other as they would find it instructive. Learner behaviour thus became as important to investigate as teacher behaviour.

This widening of focus marked a change in how classrooms are viewed: no longer as a place in which the teacher simply implements a technique or a method, and students learn. The teacher is no longer perceived as the central player, the singular actor making the lesson happen. Instead, the classroom is now regarded as the black box that needs to be opened up and deciphered. This new research direction means that the answers to our questions as to what happens in the classroom, and how it happens

"may lie somewhere in the classroom event, but that does not mean that we shall be able to *understand* these classroom events simply by studying their objectively observable characteristics. We shall perhaps find a way, following Breen's suggestions, of treating the language classroom as a whole culture" Allwright (1988:257)

Breen (1985) argues that we will only be able to understand classroom language learning and teaching if we go beyond the merely observable in our research and make at least a serious attempt to adequately account for the social as well as the cognitive aspects of classroom language learning. In treating the class as a culture in and of itself, investigation will require an anthropologist's rather than a statistician's expertise. Approaching the classroom as a culture and studying this culture involves conducting classroom-centred research instead of simulated research conducted in language laboratories. It is research that is

"...centred on the classroom, as distinct from, for example, research that concentrates on the *inputs* to the classroom (the syllabus, the teaching materials) or on the *outputs* from the classroom (learner achievement scores)" Allwright (1983:191).

Such research, a relatively recent phenomenon in educational research, treats the language classroom not just as the setting for investigation but, more importantly, as the object of investigation. Classroom processes become the central focus. The key questions addressed in such research are:

- What is happening here specifically? and
- What do these happenings mean to the people engaged in them?

Classroom-centred research is a field defined by its choice of where to look for its data, rather than by any consensus about what to look for in its data. It is this openness to foci that makes it especially suited to researching classroom culture. In this regard, my research is classroom-centred research which looks at classroom processes in order to study classroom culture.

## **2.5. Classroom Culture as Relevant Phenomena for Study**

### ***2.5.1. Researcher Pre-dispositions and Assumptions***

The preceding discussion, in presenting a brief history of the evolution of language teaching research until it arrived at research into classroom processes, shows the great diversity of research within language teaching. As diverse as they may be, all research in this field (for that matter, all research in general) have in common the fact that they are all based on assumptions - some tested and others untested - and beliefs about the nature of language and language learning. What researchers deem worthy of study in the second-language classroom reflects the perspective(s) through which the classroom is viewed – be it educational, sociological, psychological, or linguistic. On a deeper level, what we see as worthy of study, even from within the same perspective, is shaped by our assumptions about the world, how we see reality, and our notions of causality. These determine what researchers identify as relevant phenomena (see van Lier, 1988:71). And they determine the approach researchers use to carry out research. Chapter 3 will consider, in greater detail, the inter-connectedness among relevant phenomena, researcher assumptions, research paradigms, grand theories, and research approach.

“Second-language classroom research, in studying the processes and circumstances of second-language development, aims to identify the phenomena that promote or hamper learning in the classroom.”  
van Lier (1988:71)

In addressing the issue of identification of relevant phenomena, I recognise that it is important for researchers to be aware of the perspectives they bring to bear in their

investigations of what happens in the SL classroom; the assumptions these perspective are based on; and the beliefs researchers hold about research and SL learning.

My assumptions have led me to recognise classroom culture as relevant phenomena, and to make it the focus of this study. In doing so, I credit context and culture for playing an important role in determining much of what happens in the learning environment. This in turn means that I view language learning from a language socialisation rather than from a language acquisition perspective. The latter, which adopts a linguistic or mentalist approach, derives to a greater or lesser extent from first-language acquisition studies and assumes certain parallels between first- and second-language acquisition. Language socialisation, as discussed in the previous section, regards language development as a social process determined by relationships between individuals and groups. I do not see language socialisation as existing in a competitive relationship with language acquisition. To the contrary, they are viewed as complementary to each other. Within the language socialisation perspective social context occupies central position. It is not that mental processes are unimportant. They are, but are viewed as situated within a larger sociocultural context (Davis 1995:432).

To be able to discuss ‘classroom culture’ as a phenomenon worthy of research, it first needs to be defined. I would like to begin by describing the characteristics of the language classroom, before proceeding to a discussion of the meaning of ‘culture’ as I work towards a definition of classroom culture.

### **2.5.2. The Classroom**

Van Lier defines the L2 classroom as a

“gathering, for a given period of time, of two or more persons (one of whom generally assumes the role of instructor) for the purposes of language learning” (1988:47).

Adapted from van Lier (1988:98-99) and Seedhouse (1996:22-23) is a list of features that define classroom interactions as being significantly different from other interactive settings in the way participation is organised:



- Participants arrive with pre-formed notions as to what is to be said and done. The teacher usually enacts a cognitive plan, which the students, by virtue of being students, accept.
- Within the classroom, the more typical concerns that occupy participants in everyday interactions such as making small talk, asking favours, etc., are, officially at least, of secondary importance.
- The lesson or parts of it such as tasks, activities, etc. are 'framed' (see Goffman, 1974) so that their ideal sequence or performance is determined in advance.
- Well-established routines that are so well known that they no longer need prefacing can be observed through specific patterns of participation. These give rise to a lesson structure which entails rules about appropriate patterns of participation governing who should speak, when, about what, etc. The classroom is reluctant to allow simultaneous or overlapping talk. One speaker speaks at a time.

### ***2.5.3. The Language Classroom***

The characteristics of the L2 classroom that differentiate it from other subject classrooms are as follows:

- The L2 is often (though not always) medium of instruction as well as learning object. It becomes a unique setting for both language learning and language use.
- Linguistic forms and patterns of interaction are generally related to the pedagogical purposes of the teacher, and are usually subjected to his or her evaluation. Verbal input that illustrate linguistic skills, or that repair linguistic problems are usually more important than content (van Lier 1988:99).
- The teaching methods used in these classrooms differ from those employed in other subject classrooms. In describing language teaching methods, Peck (1988:20) identifies five 'macro' activities basic to language teaching. These are presentation, oral practice, grammar explanation, self-expression and listening comprehension.

## 2.5.4. Culture

“Believing, with Max Weber, that man [sic] is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.”  
Geertz (1973:5)

Bourdieu defines culture more specifically as:

“A common set of previously assimilated master patterns from which an infinite number of individual patterns directly applicable to specific situations are generated.”

Bourdieu (1971:192)

Looking closely at the key concepts used in Bourdieu’s definition, I take “*previously assimilated*” to mean that the patterns are a product of and also a reflection of early socialisation. Forming a “*common set*”, these patterns are shared by a group of people. As “*master patterns*”, they act as a grammar, or a system of rules that make some permutations of behaviour more likely and more acceptable, and others less so. Viewed in this way, culture becomes “*on the one hand the product of, on the other hand a determinant of, systems of human social interaction*” (Parsons, 1951:15). Culture is therefore not only a heritage or a social tradition that we absorb from around us. It is also what we act through, and therefore manifests itself in our actions.

## 2.6. A Working Definition of Classroom Culture

Our learned ways of interacting in the classroom are what we perceive as normal ways of interacting, and have a natural consequence on how we approach classroom interaction. These learned ways, (often) unarticulated rules that learners and teachers bring to the classroom upon first meeting as an appointed class group, manifest themselves when teachers and students interact as they negotiate and shape the culture of the classroom.

I take classroom culture to be a dynamic set of master patterns which teachers and learners draw on as they play out their roles during lessons. Classroom culture results when the individual patterns of learning that participants bring with them to the class group interact in



the particular context of the lesson, within a particular school. It is an amalgamation of earlier ways of learning, of experience with materials and methodology, and of the social context of the classroom, played out in the cultural complex of the school.

Classroom culture is therefore both product and determinant. Product because it is a meeting of already-assimilated master patterns about learning and teaching. Determinant because, as a set of culturally-based, social-psychological features which affect classroom behaviour, teachers and learners draw on it to construct and adapt to the particular teaching/learning context to create, maintain and change classroom culture as the lessons progress and the year unfolds.

Holliday describes Schutz's understanding of culture as:

“a knowledge of trustworthy recipes for interpreting the social world and handling things and men in order to obtain the best results in every situation with a minimum of effort by avoiding undesirable consequences”  
Holliday (1994:24)

Seen in this light, the culture of the classroom provides tradition and recipe for both teachers and students in the sense that there are tacit understandings about what sort of behaviour is acceptable. The discussion now explores why I view classroom culture as a phenomenon worthy of study.

### **2.6.1. The 'Classroom as Culture' Metaphor**

In his article *'The Dynamics of the Language Lesson'*, Prabhu (1992) describes his view of the lesson as an event which can be looked at from four different perspectives, each revealing a different dimension to the lesson, thereby providing a different take on the same reality. These four dimensions reveal the language lesson to be simultaneously a unit within a larger curricular programme; an implementation of a method; a routinised social event; and an arena of human interaction. The latter two are particularly relevant to the definition of classroom culture employed in this study. By defining the lesson as a routinised social event, Prabhu views roles and role relationships within classrooms as being established by traditions, so that behaviour becomes ritualistic. In this sense, the language lesson

“is a recurrent encounter between people, and like all recurrent encounters, needs the sense of security arising from shared expectations” Prabhu (1992:228)

Routines during lessons are like pockets of oasis in which participants can, because of familiarity, feel safe, secure and comfortable.

Classroom communication and activities occur through these shared expectations which act as a medium. But as much as these expectations are shared, they do not preclude the unexpected from happening. This is because, as well-established as classroom routines may be, the classroom is still and always an arena of human interaction. As in any other social environment, what happens in the classroom is influenced by real people acting and reacting with their personalities, assumptions, attitudes, insecurities and fears, making room for the unexpected to occur.

Breen (1985) calls for language learning research to tune into this ‘human’ aspect of language learning so as to investigate the more social and psychological aspects of classroom interaction. He blames, using metaphors to refer to language research, the two areas of research - the experimental laboratory metaphor and the discourse metaphor - for having directed our attention away from the crucial aspects of classroom interaction. Breen describes second language acquisition research in terms of the experimental laboratory metaphor as it aims to co-relate different experimental conditions with positive learning outcomes. However, SLA research, according to him, reduces language learning to “*linguistic or behavioural conditioning somehow independent of the learners’ social reality*” (1985:138). Regarding the classroom as discourse metaphor, he says that while it can reveal key aspects of language learning, it reduces the classroom to only what is observable in teacher-student talk. Teacher and students are reduced to the sum of what they say. The classroom as discourse metaphor does not take into sufficient account the feelings and intentions of actors beyond their words, and therefore does not account for the underlying social psychological forces that both generate and shape the discourse according to the meanings and values of teachers and learners.

Breen claims that only through looking at the classroom as culture can we begin to understand what goes on between teachers and students as they interact. He proposes the classroom as culture metaphor, more precisely what he calls ‘*the classroom as coral gardens*’, as one which focuses on meaning and addresses “*the interactive, social and often*

*opaque features of classroom which are instrumental in language learning*" (Holliday 1994:21). By using the culture metaphor, Breen highlights the interactive aspect of the classroom:

"This interaction exists on a continuum from ritualistic, predictable, phatic... to dynamic, unpredictable, diversely interpreted communication... motivated by the assumption that people can learn together in a group." (1986:143)

Breen sees the culture of the classroom as one that is as complex as the coral reef. He compares the complexity of classroom culture with the interrelated myriad life forms found in a coral reef (1986:142). Looking on the surface of the reef, we can see little in terms of life, however, beneath this surface the complexity of life forms is immense. Similarly, what can be seen of classroom interaction constitutes epiphenomena – or mere surface manifestations of far more complex things going on under the surface. By seeing the classroom as culture, we recognise that there is *"more going on between people than the transfer of knowledge and skills between members of the classroom group"* (Holliday 1994:31).

The language classroom becomes a site on which subjective and inter-subjective realities are worked out, changed and maintained. There is a *"tension between the internal world of the individual and the social world of the group"* (Breen 1986:144). The metaphor of *'classroom as coral gardens'* urges us to perceive the language class as a genuine culture, worthy of investigation in its own right. In so doing, it provides the researcher a framework with which to approach classroom language research.

Brown (1994) adopts a similar perspective and uses the metaphor of *'the classroom as an ecological system'* to depict how he thinks classrooms functions. In so doing, he echoes a perspective which stems from a longer tradition within general education which attempts to understand classroom behaviour not as cause and effect but as interactive processes that are influenced by the classroom setting as well as other contexts such as the family, the community, the wider society and its socio-economic system. Consequently, incorporated into this perspective are the attitudes and perceptions of teachers, students, school administrators, parents to complement other more regularly collected data about schools and classrooms (see Hamilton 1983).

Expanding on this line of thought, Holliday (1994) stresses the importance of looking at classroom culture in terms of its wider cultures because the classroom is after all part of interrelated and overlapping cultures of different dimensions within the school and its larger environment. He acknowledges the dearth of existing literature on classroom culture as he attempts to account for the variety of classroom cultures he has himself experienced in various educational settings. He provides descriptions of classroom cultural types in the form of typologies or models which he proposes as convenient ways of categorising classrooms. Some of these typologies are '*classroom as teaching spectacle or learning festival*'; '*pace and flow in classroom culture*'; '*large- and small class cultures*'; '*Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft cultures*'; '*rational and traditional cultures*'; and '*deep and surface action classroom culture*' (see Holliday 1994:34-46). He sees these typologies as possible extreme cases:

“The categories are therefore heuristic – notional standards against which to compare reality – and must not be taken as real. Typologies are ideal types in the tradition of Max Weber – i.e. heuristic inventions against which ‘real world’ eventualities can be measured, and between which tendencies and movements can be traced” (1994:48).

Real classroom scenarios will fall somewhere between typologies, and will be made up of a mixture of different typologies. Having shown how the '*classroom as culture*' metaphor is a viable lens through which classroom language learning can be investigated, the discussion now turns to a consideration of some features of classroom culture.

## **2.7. Features of Classroom Culture**

The previous section showed how classroom culture carries tradition and recipe, expressiveness and complexity. Like other cultures, the culture of the classroom also contains stress, and as a response to this stress, a capacity for change. It is related to a complex of other cultures in the host educational environment, which includes the school, community and society. Holliday (1994) discusses the work of researchers who note relations between classroom culture and the wider national culture in contexts as diverse as Egypt and Alaska. The fact that classroom culture comes to mirror the national culture which lies beyond the confines of the school is understandable as teachers and learners are culture carriers. They cannot but carry their culture as they cannot be separated from it. In the classroom, in their actions together, teachers and students constitute environments for one

another, organising their social ecology as they construct cultural norms. In exploring the process and structure of this ecology, Erickson reasons that

“All human groups have some form of social organization. While it is universal that regularly interacting sets of individuals possess the capacity to construct norms by which their social ecology is organized – face to face, and in wider spheres up and out to the level of the society as a whole – the particular forms that this social organization takes are specific to the set of individuals involved. Thus, we can say that social organization has both a local and a nonlocal character.” (1986:128)

Cultures are local in the sense that they are distinctive to that set of individuals who, interacting recurrently through time, come to share local understandings and traditions. Erickson (1986:128) refers to such cultures as microcultures. The nonlocal character of microcultures refers to nonlocal influences on local action which come from the general culture. As culture is our learned and shared standards for perceiving, believing, acting, and evaluating the actions of others, it follows that our cultural learning profoundly influences the classroom culture that we set up.

Nonlocal influence also stems from the perception that local members have of interests or constraints in the world beyond the classroom. This macro view of the classroom holds that there is indeed a wider social structure within which classroom life is embedded, echoing the ideas of Durkheim (1958) who saw society as a reality in itself, with social facts that local actors in the classroom take account of. However, in proposing an interpretive perspective with which to study the structuring of classroom culture, Erickson parts company with Durkheim. The issue for Erickson is to explore how local and nonlocal cultures relate to participants in the classroom as they conduct social action together. Unlike Durkheim, Erickson (1986) does not assume mechanistic causal linkages between nonlocal outside realities and local realities of face to face social relations within the classroom. Thus, society and culture exist, but not in a reified state. So, while social class positions exist, they do not *cause* school achievement or under achievement; it is people, in specific interactions, who influence school performance.

The microculture of a classroom comes about in everyday interaction. Allwright and Bailey (1991:18-19) see interaction, in class or anywhere, as having to be managed by everyone involved. They stress that interaction is not something that people do to others. It is

something that people do with each other, collectively. In stressing the co-management of classroom interaction, they describe how, by teaching and managing the class in different ways, the teacher constrains the range of actions that are appropriate and reasonable for students to respond with. Correspondingly, students also 'manage' interaction through their behaviour which constrains the range of action choices that make sense for their teacher to consider selecting. As students "*have a role in determining teacher's ways of doing teaching and/or classroom management,*" they play a collaborative part in structuring their classroom environment in which to learn and display what they have learned Cazden (1986:440).

In their actions together, teachers and students give rise to emergent solutions that become institutionalised as local traditions (i.e. culture of the classroom). This is what Allwright (1996) refers to as the '*co-construction of classroom culture*'. The participants act according to their cultural rules, and as they do so, these rules become vivified in situationally specific ways. The resulting microculture is drawn on by those who share it as they assign meanings to their actions in their daily life.

Cazden describes the coming together of a microculture in terms of '*frames of references*' (1986:434). Through regular contact, individuals establish their individual and collective frames of reference which enable them to draw on their knowledge of social and linguistic behaviour so that they can interpret what is happening in the interaction, and respond appropriately, all the while continuing to manage the interaction. Their linguistic response is a means through which they communicate their definitions of the situation to one another. This is part of a generative negotiated process of classroom talk in which meanings are co-created.

This does not imply that the process of coming to share meanings is one that is smooth and trouble-free. Differences in perception developed in previous or at other interaction experiences result in '*frame clashes*'. While overt clashes are observable to both participants and researchers, more covert clashes can contribute to negative evaluations of student ability, and require a finer level of researcher analysis (Cazden, 1986:434). Frame clashes can also lead to change. Local microcultures cannot be and are not static:



“...because of the constant, intense dialogue between the microculture, the exigencies of practical action in the unique historical circumstances of the present moment, and the differences in perspective among members of the interacting group, the ways in which the evolving microculture can influence the actions of group members is a dynamic process in which change is constant.” Erickson (1986:130)

This dynamic quality of classroom culture enables it to be flexible, so as to be able to incorporate new members.

Apart from being dynamic, microcultures are presumed to differ from one classroom to another, no matter what degree of similarity, in terms of general demographic features, obtains between the two rooms, which may be located literally next door or across the hall from one another. All cultures have an expressive element to them which portrays their personality, seen usually more vividly by the outsider. Holliday (1994:25) describes this expressiveness of classroom culture, and writes of how all teachers experience the different personalities and ethics which different classrooms evolve. These personalities assert a social force that prevents teachers from replicating their lesson agendas with different class groups. And so the same lesson plan enacted in two classrooms leads to two very different lessons.

Accepting how microcultures can differ, one wonders if they could account, in terms of what happens in their classroom interaction, for the substantial differences in patterns of student achievement across different classrooms. It may be that the differences in organisation that we need to be interested in are quite small indeed, and radically local – little differences in everyday classroom life that make a big difference for student learning, subtly different meaning perspectives in which it makes sense, from a student’s point of view, to learn in one classroom, but not in another. From this point of view, surface similarities across classrooms are not to be treated as trivial or illusory. Local differences become interesting variations that ought to be investigated as researchers analyse for general characteristics of effective teaching. Where more mainstream positivistic research looks for general characteristics of the effective teacher, researchers approaching the classroom from this culturally rooted perspective see effective teaching as what occurs in the particular circumstances of the practice of a specific teacher, with a specific group of students on a particular day in a particular lesson.

In the classroom, the teacher is expected to teach and the learners are expected to learn. Accompanying these expectations are a series of roles that both parties take on as they try and achieve their respective goals. These predetermined goals and roles make teaching an activity and the classroom as a context more permeable to investigation than many other activities or contexts. As the teacher teaches, she assumes a pivotal position, and in an orderly classroom,

“... the teacher takes turns at will, allocates turns to others, determines topics, interrupts and reallocates turns judged to be irrelevant to those topics, and provides a running commentary on what is being said and meant, which is the main source of cohesion within and between the various sequences of the lesson.”

Edwards and Mercer (1987:43)

Viewing the classroom from the perspective of power and authority, we see that teachers, because of their role as orchestrator, are powerful controllers of the local, negotiated context of shared meanings. Indeed, teachers make people into a class. Yet, even in learning environments where teachers are vested with virtually unchecked authority, the exercise of this authority in the absence of student acceptance can at best lead only to an outward conformity to the teacher's will, so that in a teaching situation, the student possesses the ability to refuse to learn what the teacher intends should be learned.

Following the view that classroom lessons, like any other form of interaction, are co-produced, learner behaviour becomes a vital part of what constitutes instruction, of what determines the learning opportunities that learners themselves get. This means that while the teacher has, officially at least, the power, s/he has to persuade students to learn. If students resist the teacher by withholding learning, the teacher is unable to teach. Student resistance could take on a more obvious form, when students cause interactional sabotage during classroom interaction - often labelled as discipline problems. Students could resist more covertly when they are unwilling to answer a question, or when they chose not to seek clarification.

“In the classroom social system as a political economy, the power to withhold the currency that is essential to the system – student learning – ultimately resides in the student.”

Erickson 1986:137 (see also Allwright 1991:19)



So, although the teacher may control the experiences the learner is exposed to, it is the learner who selects what is learnt from them (Block 1996:168).

### ***2.7.1. Structure within Classroom Culture***

Edwards and Mercer (1987) contend that while the teacher orchestrates the lesson as she installs order, what is perceived as orderliness is a set of ground rules which is implicit in the everyday running of the lesson. These ground rules are vital contributory factors to the framework for the execution and interpretation of all that happens in the lesson. They are underlying, implicit rules of interpretation which define how what happens in the classroom are to be read or responded to. Consequently, when ground rules are misinterpreted or ignored, classroom encounters become disorderly, and when this happens, repair is called for to reinstall order.

Implied in their description is the theoretical assumption that, while classroom discourse can be both orderly and disorderly, there is in operation, a mechanism that inclines or urges it to regain order. Order is thus its normal state, or its state of equilibrium. Theoretically, this order is more easily achieved in the classroom (as opposed to during a conversation between two strangers) because teachers and students are fulfilling expectations about the nature of communicative work in which they should be engaged. Their predetermined discursal roles and goals converge as teachers teach and students accept to be taught. Both roles and goals help to install order. It is in fact our knowledge of roles and how they manifest themselves that enables us to recognise the situationally appropriate forms of talk which in turn makes it possible for us to read off social relationships by looking at transcripts.

Interaction within any classroom is systematically organised, even within chaotic classrooms. Indeed, chaos can only occur against a larger backdrop of order: we identify chaos in a classroom by reference to some concept of structure that we expect to be visibly and audibly observable. This concept of structure is found within the culture of the classroom, and is more than a mere orientation to norms of orderly behaviour and discipline.

The concept of structure within social settings is difficult to define. Giddens (1976) sees social structure as consisting of rules and resources, where rules act as constraining factors and the resources as enabling ones. While the term 'rules' is itself far from clear-cut, this notion, or its equivalent (such as regularities, norms, routines, formulae, etc) is regularly

encountered in descriptions of classroom behaviour. Van Lier (1988:48) employs the term 'rules' as a generic concept to refer to the regularities of social behaviour. He takes resources to include both the raw materials needed for learning such as teacher, materials, other learners, the outside world, and the mechanisms that transform this input into intake which include the interaction, cognition and all its inherent strategic and co-operative work.

Rules provide a classroom with its structure while resources give it dynamism. Like the conceptual pairs of freedom and restraint, or good and evil, rules and resources exist as a pair, in relation to each other as one gives meaning to or defines the other. They are two sides of the same coin, and within the classroom, both constitute social structure. Rules allow and simultaneously regulate the application of resources. Observing a classroom, a researcher could describe what happens in it by referring to rules. He or she could also describe exactly the same phenomena in terms of resources. A balanced description would make reference to both rules and resources although this duality and overlapping trait means classroom description cannot separate the two distinct phenomena of rules and resources. Thus, instead of attempting to separate them, descriptions should look for a connecting pattern that underlies the social structure of the classroom. This structure is itself a delicately balanced application of forces and sources of power.

This connecting pattern underlying the social structure of the classroom becomes visible in the routines that evolve. When things are done along similar lines a number of times, they turn into routines where all participants know what is likely to happen next. This leads to activities similar to rituals where participants know what to do next (see Prabhu's description of the language lesson as a 'routinised social event' in 2.6.1). The only surprise then is when the unexpected happens. The unexpected event stems from 'resources' which enable participants to act outside rules. Such events thus reaffirm the existence of resources. Unexpected events threaten the unwritten order or flow of the lesson with a breakdown, and give rise to either sanctions (i.e. negative evaluations) or a range of strategies (some of which are improvisational) for coping. The unexpected, which may be a violation of class rules, leads to the breakdown of order and is as such perceived as an error juncture. It is of special importance for it helps to clarify or define for the participant involved, as well as for those observing, what is acceptable or appropriate. Error junctures test boundaries and could serve to redefine participant rules, and in doing so they (re)negotiate norms of participation. For these reasons, studying the breakdown of order can be especially revealing to the outsider who is attempting to articulate the culture in operation.

## **2.8. Researching Classroom Culture**

In the previous section, I described the culture of the classroom in terms of a social structure comprising rules and resources, which together serve to enforce and regulate, and alter and create the socially constituted norms of the classroom. In investigating classroom culture, I acknowledge the fact that because of the amorphousness of culture, I need to make this task more manageable by focussing on aspects of culture of the classroom. Instead of embarking on the unrealistic task of analysing everything that happens in the classroom, I plan to describe classroom culture through an analysis of classroom discourse within its social context. Viewed in relation to classroom culture, classroom discourse plays a key position for not only is it shaped by classroom culture (the culture shapes the script of the discourse), but it also shapes the culture in return.

### ***2.8.1. Discourse in Classroom Interaction Studies***

Discourse analysis focuses on the structure of naturally occurring language with the aim of studying the way sentences work in sequence to produce coherent stretches of language. While linguists investigate the features of language that bind sentences when they are used in sequence, sociologists and ethnographers study the structure of social interaction as manifested in the way people enter into and conduct dialogue. This latter group share a common concern: they stress the need to see language as a dynamic, social, interactive phenomenon, and argue that meaning is not conveyed by single sentences but by more complex exchanges in which the participants' beliefs and expectations, the knowledge they share about each other, about the world, and about the situation in which they interact, play a crucial part (Crystal 1987:116).

Classroom discourse studies generally fall into one of two classes: those that focus on form and those that focus on process. Form is regarded as that which results (i.e. product) and process is regarded as that which is done. While both process and product are generally referred to as discourse, Widdowson (1984:100) sees discourse as a communicative process, achieved through interaction, the linguistic product of which is text.

In analysing the structure of naturally occurring language, formal discourse studies look at form (or produced text) to uncover structure. Structure is seen as consisting of hierarchically

related units, and the researcher's task is therefore to establish what those units are and how they are related. Thus Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) hierarchy consists of lessons, which consist of transactions, which consist of exchanges, which consist of moves, which consist of acts. This approach, in its emphasis on form, is a classificatory framework which imposes a structure on the data from above, or outside. In so doing, it sees discourse as product, not as communicative process.

### **2.8.2. Constitutive Ethnography**

In his bid to address discourse as both product and process, Mehan (1979) applies what he terms '*constitutive ethnography*' to describe the structure and '*structuring*' (a term coined to refer to the process of creating structure in classroom interaction). Drawing on the analytical schemata of conversational analysis, Mehan describes how classroom interaction is achieved by participants who refer to a resource base of mechanisms. These mechanisms, in the immediate instance, allow participants to turn-take, to repair etc, and in the longer run, as the class progresses, enable the participants to create and maintain a social world.

Constitutive ethnography is thus the convergence of ethnography and discourse analysis. Mehan uses it to access the underlying mechanisms of classroom talk, showing how lessons become organised through interaction, or how, in Mehan's terminology, lessons become structured through structuring. Although he bases his study in an ethnically mixed English-medium elementary school, his work has immediate relevance to CR in second language classrooms as it can help to improve our understanding of interaction in these classrooms.

Unlike many language researchers before him, Mehan does not assume, a priori, that the teacher is responsible for all that happens in the classroom. He presents a social approach to discourse analysis which does not pre-allocate communicative roles. Learners are not passive recipients of their teacher's words and actions. This means that whatever is done by teacher or learner may be relevant to both structure and structuring. Every discursal contribution is seen by Mehan as significant as he aims to "*locate the organising machinery of classroom lessons in the interaction*" in the participants' words and actions (1979:23). Focusing on the 'right here' and 'right now' of classroom interaction, he addresses the immediacy of the classroom, recognising that decisions by participants to contribute in certain ways to the discourse are made instantaneously.

“These decisions are made within a reflexive framework, in which contributions to discourse can be seen as assisting the development of the discourse – proactive – as well as responding to previous contributions – reactive.” Wright (1992:56)

The proactivity and reactivity Wright refers to reveal discourse contributions to be both product and determinant of classroom discourse. This view echoes the general definition of culture discussed in 2.5.4 above, and communicates the close relationship between classroom discourse and classroom culture.

Mehan (1979) sees teachers and students as jointly accomplishing or achieving competent membership as they engage in local structuring work. Competent membership enables a learner to not just effectively participate in the flow of the lesson, but to also be able to creatively manipulate the lesson so as to increase his or her opportunities for learning. Incompetent membership prevents a learner from benefiting fully from instruction.

### **Limitations of Constitutive Ethnography**

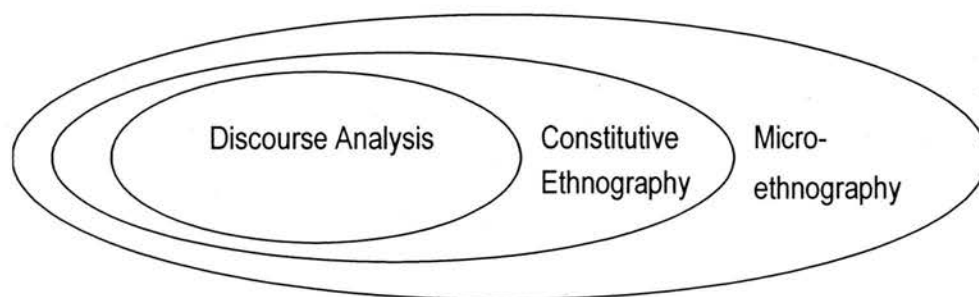
In relating form to process, or structure to structuring, constitutive ethnography attempts to present a model of interactional analysis that goes beyond a form-only oriented model such as discourse analysis. When trying to present an account of how what is said relates to what is happening, one is invariably pressured into creating a model which accounts for all data. Given that classrooms are in a constant state of flux, this is an exceedingly difficult, if at all possible, task. There will always be leftover data that do not fit neatly into models, and the picture will never be complete. However, Mehan does succeed in identifying structures within classroom interaction. He sees the lessons, for instance, as being made up of phases, each of which consists of distinctive interactional sequences (1979:49).

The detailed analysis of classroom interaction, the fundamental strength of constitutive ethnography, is possible perhaps because Mehan focuses solely on the classroom, seeing it as a boundary marker. In treating the classroom as an entity in its own right, Mehan sets the platform for the main limitation of constitutive ethnography: it suffers from being inward-looking, for it does not address the classroom within its wider social context. While constitutive ethnography sees classroom talk as being unique to a group of people in a class, it does not explore how this talk links (through the features it shares) with the talk of the wider social context. It does not have the means to refer to the wider social context. As

classroom communication does not exist in isolation, apart from larger society, an explanation of the emergence of classroom discourse patterns that does not refer to general features of wider society has to be incomplete. This approach, in not addressing where learners come from - and where they go to after their lessons fails to meet an important condition of the holistic approach of ethnography. An approach which addresses the embeddedness of local classroom culture and which deals with the social and linguistic realities beyond the classroom is microethnography.

### **2.8.3. Microethnography**

I perceive discourse analysis, constitutive ethnography and microethnography as a series of concentric circles, with discourse analysis occupying the innermost position and microethnography, the outermost circle (see Figure 2.1).



**Figure 2.1: Methods of Inquiry into Classroom Communication**

Although all analyse interaction, each deals with it in a more encompassing manner, displaying an increasing recognition of the external influences on interaction. Discourse analysis seeks to identify the structure of communication which is created by participants with pre-allocated roles; constitutive ethnography looks at the structure, and structuring in terms of local negotiation. While participants are not pre-allocated roles, it is an ahistorical approach which does not address the wider context within which the classroom is located. Microethnography does not use pre-allocated roles as it explores how local negotiation (seen through constitutive ethnography) works with external influences to produce the



microculture of the classroom. In its study of classroom communication, microethnography emphasises the embeddedness of the classroom within wider society.

Perceiving the classroom as a social context with its own culture, microethnographers take '*competence membership*' in the classroom (like cultural membership) to comprise both social and linguistic competence. It is the emphasis on the social aspect, recognising social reality as the driving force behind participants' classroom behaviour that differentiates microethnography from constitutive ethnography.

Classroom interaction is viewed as being encased within different levels of the wider social context. Interaction occurs within individual lessons, which occur within regular class groups, which occur in a school, located in a community, in wider society. This multi-levelled embeddedness means that what happens in the classroom, especially in terms of how classroom communication occurs, is a consequence of more than local negotiation. An individual's social and linguistic behaviour in the classroom is influenced by his social circumstances. However, exactly how these external social circumstances are seen to affect classroom behaviour has given rise to two views within microethnography – the foreground view and the background view.

The 'background view' (Brown and Fraser, 1979) sees the individual in class as being enclosed by the larger social structure, and proposes an analysis of encounters in the classroom which looks at the individuals and the structure of society. Links are thereby established between an individual's behaviour and his/her social circumstances.

This is a functional explanation similar to that provided by Durkheim (see 2.7) which uses larger social structure to explain classroom behaviour, and which consequently denies the individual his or her autonomy or power to actively negotiate the classroom encounter. It assumes that classroom interactions can be explained in terms of mechanistic causal linkages between nonlocal outside realities and local realities of classroom social relations. This also suggests that it is possible to separate or maintain a distinction between interaction in the classroom and the wider social structure. Like Wright (1992:60), I perceive social knowledge as being very much alive in classroom interactions. Indeed, one cannot remove an individual's history from the way s/he interacts socially and linguistically. It is unavoidable that "*before the lesson learners come from somewhere...*" (van Lier 1988:x).

A student's external realities will always surface in classroom encounters. However, it is not an individual's social class that causes interactions, and determines school performance. Instead, it is through specific interactions with others in the microculture of the classroom that an individual's social class comes to influence his/her school performance. This is the 'foreground view' of ethnography a view supported by Erickson (1982), Edwards and Westgate (1987), and Wright (1992), as they use microethnography to first describe and then seek to explain how talk within the classroom comes to be organised. The section that follows examines the ideas of Erickson (1982; 1986) as he uses microethnography as a *theory of lessons*, to provide a basis for understanding the ground rules that underlie lessons.

In 'doing' a lesson together, Erickson (1982) sees teachers and students as drawing simultaneously on two sets of procedural knowledge: knowledge of the academic task structure (ATS) and knowledge of the social participation structure (SPS). This distinction between the cognitive and the social is a commonly employed metaphor used to distinguish between classroom life and classroom talk. ATS (classroom talk) is the "*patterned set of constraints provided by the logic of sequencing in the subject-matter content of the lesson*" and the SPS (classroom life) is the "*patterned set of constraints on the allocation of interactional rights and obligations of various members of the interacting group*" (Erickson 1982:154).

Erickson outlines four definable aspects of ATS which together govern the logical sequencing of interactional moves. These are:

- the logic of subject-matter sequencing
- the information content of the various sequential steps
- the "meta content" cues toward steps and strategies for completing the task
- the physical materials through which tasks and task components are manifested and with which tasks are accomplished.

The information contained in these four aspects is what constitutes the academic task environment. Paralleling these four aspects of the academic task environment of a lesson are four definable aspects of the social task environment, which together govern the sequencing and articulation of interaction. These are:



- the social gate-keeping of access to people and other information sources during the lesson
- the allocation of communicative rights and obligations among the various interactional partners in the events
- the sequencing and timing of functional 'slots' in the interaction
- the simultaneous actions of all those engaged in interaction during the lesson.

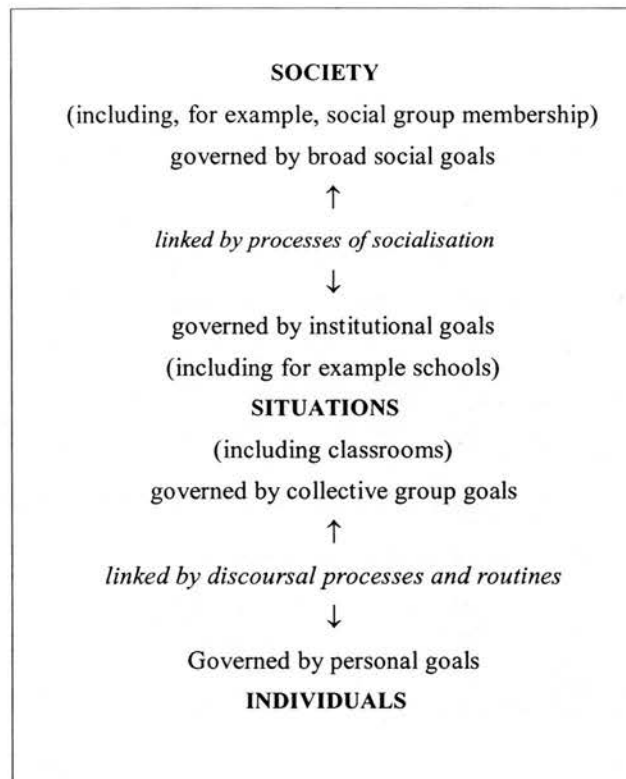
While classroom talk concerns subject matter, *"successful participation in the lesson involves knowledge of subject matter information and its logical organisation, as well as knowledge of discourse and its social organisation"* Erickson (1982: 156). It follows that to develop an interactional theory of cognitive learning and teaching in the social environment of the classroom, researchers have to consider the social and academic aspects of lesson tasks. Moving towards a more macro perspective, Erickson explains how such a theory of lessons would rest within a larger theory of education which addresses at least three levels of organisation (see Figure 2.2). These are the general society and culture; specific situations; and specific individuals. These levels of organisation are connected through processes, one of which is the socialisation of the individual. Socialisation is seen as a two-way process, and the explanations in the theory preserve the integrity of each level of organisation in its own right.

Erickson proposes a theory of school lessons as educational encounters. These encounters occur within

"partially bounded situations in which teachers and students follow previously learned, culturally normative 'rules', and also innovate by making new kinds of sense together in adapting to the fortuitous circumstances of the moment... Teachers and students are seen as engaged in praxis, improvising situational variations within and around socioculturally prescribed thematic material and occasionally, within the process of improvisation, discovering new possibilities for learning and for social life."

Erickson (1982:166)

In accessing classroom culture for study, I need to look at social action within the classroom. Social action encompasses classroom discourse and classroom action. A researcher penetrates the knowledge needed for competent membership in the culture of the classroom by analysing discourse and action.



**Figure 2.2: Levels of Organisation in Classroom Life (Wright, 1992:72)**

## **2.9. Discourse in Classroom Culture**

Microethnography differentiates between social action and (asocial) behaviour. Drawing on the work of the famous sociologist and economist Max Weber (1922), social action is defined as *behaviour which is oriented to what others are doing in the scene as well as to what others may be doing outside the immediate scene at hand*. Behaviour in the classroom is never just behaviour. It is social action, and although outside influences impinge on it, it has, to some extent, a life of its own.

“It is extremely important to keep hold of the notion of the school lesson as an encounter, that is, a partially bounded social occasion, influenced by cultural norms and having within its own frame something of a life of its own. Such a view of the lesson avoids the extremes of social or psychological determinism on the one hand, and radical contextualism on the other.”

Erickson (1982:165)

Drawing on this, what a participant says in the classroom is oriented towards what others are saying and doing (i.e. towards other social action) in the classroom and outside the classroom. In studying classroom discourse as a significant component of classroom culture, I need to view it as social action. When teachers and students interact to create discourse, they participate in the structuring of discourse, employing *contextualisation cues and conventions*. Used by Gumperz (1982a) to refer to surface-structural means through which communicative intent and interpretive form are signalled, these cueing procedures and conventions are learned, and their usage is shared within speech communities. They point to specific features of a context, and are manifested across many levels of organisation of speech and non-verbal behaviour such as syntax, lexicon, intonation, body posture, gaze, and interpersonal distance. Knowing how to read contextualisation cues is crucial to communicative competence, enabling one to communicate intelligibly, appropriately and effectively. These cues and conventions account for the ways in which speakers' interpretations of each other's contributions are channelled in one direction or another. They are part of the participants' knowledge, and are employed as monitoring devices in discursal and interactive terms as they enable members to interpret, and contribute appropriately to discourse. Fairclough (1985) refers to *naturalised discursal routines* - routines learnt at previous encounters, and therefore naturalised, which are brought to the classroom as part of the participants' social and linguistic repertoire.

## **2.10. Classroom Action and Classroom Culture**

The previous section, while focusing on classroom discourse, describes classroom culture as comprising classroom discourse and classroom action (where 'action' is 'social action', which is meaningful behaviour). Where a narrow or more focused study of classroom culture would look only at classroom discourse, a wider approach would see discourse within action. What participants do is as important as what they say.

The ways of behaving that an individual acquires mirror those that operate in his family and community. S/he learns how to regard family members, and how to relate to them. S/he learns ways of relating to parents, siblings, the extended family, and members of the wider community. How an individual views his/her parents influences how other elder significant others like the teacher are viewed. Is the teacher an authority figure, to be treated with deference? Or is the teacher to be questioned, or challenged even? Similarly, how one

interacts with sibling (for example, as equals, or as members of a hierarchical system) influences interaction patterns amongst classmates. Learners may arrive at the classroom with a collectivist approach to human interaction, and interact freely and comfortably with other learners as equals. Such a collectivist approach to social interaction would make it more likely for learners to ask each other (instead of the teacher) for help. Are achievement motivation, competition and the importance of 'saving face' more important to the learner? If so, s/he would avoid taking risks by volunteering an answer that may be incorrect, or by seeking clarification with the teacher. In a society that emphasises respect for the past and respect for the teacher's authority, the behaviour of both teachers and students will mirror these values. This process of mirroring leads to the classroom being described as a social microcosm. Such mirroring is complex when the wider society is not homogeneous: when it is divided, be it along lines of social economic status or ethnicity as in a multicultural society.

Allwright (1996) differentiates between external social and internal classroom pressures, and notes how they are inextricably bound up with each other. While some of the social pressures experienced in the classroom can be best understood with reference to the broader society from which the participants come and in which the lessons take place, he holds that there are also pressures that arise within the classroom itself and that these can be studied in their own terms. Approaching the classroom as a social microcosm, Allwright puts forth a strong case for studying socialisation (instead of acquisition) in the classroom. He differentiates between socialisation as *process* and socialisation as *product*. The former is what happens during lessons as participants are socialised, and the latter views classroom behaviour as the result of prior socialisation experiences (i.e. participants behave as they have previously learnt to).

Looking at socialisation as process, Allwright illustrates the contributions of both teachers and learners. Socialisation is viewed as a normal part of the teacher's role, especially in the context of compulsory schooling in state school systems, where

"the teacher is perhaps legally *in loco parentis*, and may be officially expected by 'society' both to socialise learners into the immediate environment, and simultaneously to play a major role in socialising learners into the wider society outside of and subsequent to the compulsory school system itself..."

Allwright (1996:212)

Learners in turn can sometimes be seen to socialise their teachers into being the sorts of teachers they themselves want. Allwright distinguishes between internal socialisation which is the development of patterns of behaviour appropriate to the classroom as a social setting, and external socialisation which refers to the development of patterns of behaviour appropriate to the world outside and beyond the classroom. Within internal socialisation, Allwright (1996:214) differentiates between patterns of behaviour appropriate to the more purely social aspects of the functioning of the classroom group as a social group (encompassing such notions as general courtesy, and corresponding with the concept of 'social pressures'), and those more directly relevant to the functioning of the classroom group as a learning group (covering notions like co-operation on learning tasks and corresponding with the concept of 'pedagogic pressures').

Classroom behaviour is therefore not a simple binary matter of a set of straightforward either/or decisions. Instead, Allwright suggests that it is more realistic to think of classroom behaviour as

“some sort of balancing act between opposing forces, a tightrope walk... a reinvented compromise between competing social and pedagogic demands.” (1996:223)

He looks at how social and pedagogic pressures are in a state of conflict in the classroom, and discusses the fundamental point that teachers and learners cannot just choose between these two pressures, opting to be influenced by only one set of pressures. Interestingly, Allwright sees this conflict as one that is typically resolved in favour of social rather than the pedagogic pressures.

## **2.11. Research Issue**

In 2.2, I described the study as one that focuses on classroom processes within the larger field of classroom-centred research. The study's approach to the classroom is best represented by *the classroom as culture* metaphor. This chapter has identified the co-construction of classroom culture as the main research issue. The study aims to investigate how classroom cultures are shaped, sustained and altered in daily classroom interactions by looking at how teachers and students, from initial meeting to a time of greater familiarity and stability, co-construct implicit and explicit rules by which the lessons abide. The a priori

assumption is that *all* participants shape this culture. The co-construction of classroom culture is viewed from a perspective that attempts to understand classroom behaviour as interactive processes that are influenced by the classroom setting as well as the wider contexts. Microethnography explores how local negotiation (seen in classroom interaction) works with external influences to produce the microculture of the classroom. A key determinant and product of this culture is classroom discourse. This being so, classroom culture is accessed through an analysis of the learners' and teacher's linguistic behaviour.

## **2.12. Summary**

The chapter has located the study by providing a review of literature around and on classroom culture, and by outlining the theoretical and conceptual framework within which the study is set. The research issue of classroom culture provides the study with its broad topic and determines the methodological approach of the study. Chapter Three discusses the adopted research methodology.

## **Chapter 3. Orientation of the Research Methodology**

“The challenge in life is to preserve and feed an open mind, so that nothing is shut out by the walls of preconception. The purpose is to see with the clear eyes of a child so that the intrinsic solution to each problem becomes apparent.”

Dan Kiley, architect

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter surveys the field to provide a review of what others have said and done as I contemplate the approach and methodology most appropriate to the study. It begins with a brief review of research methodology in language learning research, before widening its focus to consider the relationship shared by theory, research question and methodology. The chapter then narrows its scope to a detailed consideration of the approach of the study – the interpretive approach, which relates to the quote by Kiley above. I first consider what a descriptive and ethnographically-inclined approach towards the study of classroom culture can achieve in terms of helping us to better understand some of the processes through which classroom culture comes into existence and continues to be modified in everyday classroom life. I then consider how this approach can be applied to the proposed investigation.

### **3.2. Brief Review of Methodology within Language Learning Research**

Like the evolution of research topics and themes, the evolution of research methods in language classrooms has paralleled but lagged behind the evolution of research methods in general educational research. Today, methodological approaches to the study of L2 classrooms are diverse, reflecting the great diversity of research questions and purposes that these methodological approaches serve, and the range of theoretical perspectives on the conduct of research. These different perspectives reflect the evolution of L2 classroom research as one influenced by researchers from different disciplines. Research developments in different disciplines have contributed to the variety of investigative procedures such that CR is today a field of inquiry which is an amalgamation of different disciplines (see Chaudron 1988:13).



The positivistic approach to CR has as its goal, the prescription of ideal classroom practices for teachers. It is the ultimate objective of CR to identify those characteristics of classrooms that lead to efficient learning of the instructional content, so that empirically supported L2 teacher training and programme development can be implemented. Research rests on the basic premise that research findings, when taught to teachers during teacher training, automatically translate into the classroom as part of how the teacher teaches.

When for example, Rowe (1974) (in Erickson, 1986), found that waiting longer for student answers, students produce more reflective answers, teachers were told of this and trained to pause for a longer 'wait-time'. Yet, a few months later, it was found that the teachers went back to using shorter wait-time in lesson dialogue with students. This illustrates that teachers do not always persist in using recommended teaching behaviours, despite the research evidence that indicates that certain teacher behaviours can influence students to learn more, and despite experience that shows that teachers can indeed be trained to use these behaviours more frequently.

This corresponds with the point made earlier in 2.10 regarding Allwright's differentiation between social and pedagogic pressures in the classroom, the former being when teachers and learners are pressured into behaving in accordance with the more purely social aspects of the functioning of the classroom group as a social group, and the latter when they behave in accordance with ways more directly relevant to the functioning of the classroom group as a learning group. Allwright sees this conflict between social and pedagogic pressures as more typically resolved in favour of the social rather than the pedagogic. Thus, by going back to shorter wait-time in lesson dialogue, the teachers in Rowe's study above are allowing themselves to be influenced more by social rather than pedagogic pressures.

By attempting to determine which variables best lead to academic achievement, SLA has played a major role in firmly establishing quantitative, experimental methodology in language learning research to such an extent that some have commented that it is

“arguable that the SLA connection may have actually hindered our progress in terms of research method, since it has fostered what is in some respects a fundamentally asocial view of the language acquisition process, at a time when educational research in other fields has been busy accommodating itself to a thoroughly social view of classroom learning.”

Allwright (1988:257)



Referring back to Rowe's study as an example, it is meaningful to know that an increase in 'wait-time' in lesson dialogue influences students to produce more reflective answers. However, the study highlights that it is also important that we know why teachers do not persist in using increased wait-time. This has opened the door to another set of questions:

"How do teachers make sense such that a behaviour like wait-time seems sociolinguistically inappropriate? What are the intuitions about interaction against which doing wait-time behaviour runs counter? How might these intuitions be changed – or is there another behavioural means that might provide a less counterintuitive route to the same ends?"  
Erickson (1986:132)

These questions about the specifics of practice derive from the interpretive approach to research, and reveal the perspective through which this approach views the classroom. This approach arose as a response to questions which the process-product or positivistic approach either did not ask or was not able to provide answers to. Addressing a different set of questions within language learning research, interpretive research does not compete with, but shares a complementary relationship with positivistic research.

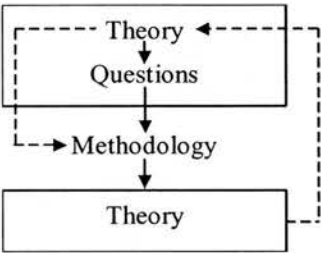
I see language learning research as the means to an end, the end of which is the construction of a large and complex jigsaw puzzle. When complete, the puzzle will put together a picture of language teaching and learning. Some pieces of the puzzle can only be brought together through SLA research while other parts of the picture call for the use of interpretive research. These research approaches with their theoretical frames of reference pose and serve different questions. The next section explores in more detail the relationship shared by research paradigm (or theoretical frame of reference), research question and research methodology.

### **3.3. The Relationship between Research Question and Methodology & The Place of Theory**

"What is important for researchers is not the choice of apriori paradigms, or methodologies, but rather to be clear about what the purpose of the study is and to match that purpose with the attributes most likely to accomplish it. Put another way, the methodological design should be determined by the research question."

Larson-Freeman & Long (1991:14)

It is clear that researchers should choose an approach in light of the purpose of the study, and that consequently, research questions or issues should determine, if not at least suggest, research methodology. Methodology serves research questions or issues by providing appropriate or suitable means of investigation. Seen from a broader level, research questions (or issues) and research methodology are located within the realm of, and operate interdependently with theoretical paradigm. See Figure 3.1 below.



**Figure 3.1: The Relationship between Research Questions and Methodology within Theory**

“All methods are ways of asking questions that presume an underlying set of assumptions, a structure of relevance, and a form of rationality.”

Simon & Dippo (1986:195)

This set of assumptions forms the researcher’s theoretical paradigm. I use the word paradigm as used by Kuhn (1962) to refer to an interrelated set of theoretical presuppositions that lead the researcher to view the world around the research interest in a particular way. A researcher’s theoretical paradigm influences the way in which data is interpreted and explained so as to be able to inform theory. Theories inform the process of conceptualising, conducting, analysing, and interpreting research. When research informs theory, thereby generating more theory, the cycle is complete (see Davis 1995).

The central problem within language learning research is how to identify, describe, and interpret the actions and contributions of participants in the language classroom in such a way that their significance for language learning can be understood. Bolinger (1980) discusses the inter-connected relationship between peoples’ everyday life and the language they use. As with every other aspect of life, this relationship is never stagnant and is instead

constantly evolving. The main data that the researcher has to analyse is essentially linguistic as language is the means through which social life is created and maintained. In a social encounter, words are manifestations of the speaker's psychological reality. Discourse is seen as a cultural practice, for linguistic data is indexical of the cultures that produce it. Yet, an analysis of discourse alone is inadequate.

Van Lier (1988), Holliday (1994), Wright (1992), and Breen (1985) maintain that in order to understand how what happens in language classrooms relates to language learning, we need more than linguistic descriptive tools drawn from discourse analysis, and that this involves being open to the contributions made by a variety of relevant disciplines. The interpretive approach, specifically educational ethnography, located on the confluence of education, language studies, sociology and anthropology is such an inter-disciplinary endeavour into CR. As an approach, its primary purpose is to serve the theoretical paradigm that underlies it. I shall now consider this paradigm that underpins my study, looking at the social theory embodied by the interpretive approach, and at the main philosophical, theoretical, and methodological considerations involved in the study.

### **3.4. The Interpretive Approach**

The term 'interpretive', is used to embrace the whole family of qualitative approaches because it points to the key feature of family resemblance among the various qualitative approaches, which is "*the central research interest in human meaning in social life and its elucidation and exposition by the researcher*" (Erickson 1986:119).

This approach presents a theory for researchers, providing research questions, methods, and findings with a disciplinary home (or base) and frames of reference (see Freeman, 1995). As a theoretical paradigm, the approach is "*a reliable and coherent account of what is, as well as a valid blueprint for further action*" (van Lier, 1988:21). It locates ideas and intuitions on a solid footing and aids in directing empirical investigation.

The German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, one of the first to argue that the methods of human sciences should be hermeneutical, or interpretive, holds that our aim as researchers should be to discover and communicate the meaning-perspectives of the people studied (in Erickson 1986:123). Marx, addressing meaning perspectives, adopts a somewhat similar

position, and writes of the historical embeddedness of consciousness. He sees one's view of self and of the world as being profoundly shaped by and through the concrete circumstances of daily living in one's specific situation in life. Applied to my study, this means that the perceptions that teachers and students have of interests or constraints in the world beyond their face-to-face relations act as a source of nonlocal influence on their interactions with each other. There is a social structure within which classroom life is located and, in this structure, there are implicit principles of order that influence human behaviour outside the consciousness of those influenced. These principles of order, whether known or unknown to us, are both products and determinants of our meaning perspectives.

In its investigations into meaning perspectives, the approach acknowledges the dialogue in human affairs between the particular and the general. Individual events are seen to echo wider sociocultural forces and vice-versa. This view gives rise to the 'hermeneutic circle' – a means of investigation whereby phenomena are extracted from the circumstances of their occurrence, and then interpreted according to the nature of their source. Rigorous explorations of the relationships between events and their environments lead to explanations (Wright 1992:100).

The approach sees classroom behaviour as too complex to be reduced to categories in an observational schedule, or variables in an (at best) causal relationship. The ultimate aim of this approach is not to discover abstract universals arrived at through statistical generalisation from a sample to a population but to discover concrete universals. This is achieved by first studying a specific case in great detail, and by then comparing it to another case studied in the same way. Essentially, the approach operates in the tradition of naturalistic inquiry, where a naturally occurring event is studied, without control over variables, or intentional intervention in the form of a treatment found in laboratory experiments. In a key text "*Naturalistic Inquiry*", Lincoln and Guba (1985:36-38) list five axioms of this approach. These are:

1. Only time-bound and context-bound hypotheses are possible.
2. Realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic.
3. It is impossible to distinguish causes from effects since '*all entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping*'.
4. The knower and the known are interactive and inseparable.
5. Inquiry is value-bound.

The discussion now addresses each of these.

### ***3.4.1. Only time-bound and context-bound hypotheses are possible***

The importance of the environment, or context, has already been alluded to in the discussion of the hermeneutic circle as method exploring the relationship between the part and the whole. The role of context finds expression in a key tenet of ethnographic research – that of the naturalistic-ecological hypothesis. This is the belief that the context in which the behaviour occurs has a significant influence on that behaviour and so to find out about behaviour, we need to investigate it in the natural contexts in which it occurs (Nunan 1992:53-54).

Looking closely at how context enters into analyses of classroom discourse, Cazden (1986:434-435) sees a two-way relationship between participants' behaviour and context. Context is firstly the situation as the speaker finds it antecedent to the moment of speaking. The speaker's utterances must be appropriate to the rules for speaking in the context. However, in the process of performing, participants can go beyond conforming to the rules of the pre-existing context by actively speaking to create and actually redefine the context. An utterance or action is part of the ecological system of the context.

### ***3.4.2. Realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic***

The interpretive approach emphasises the important aspect of the multiple perspective as it focuses on the co-construction of meaning within a particular social setting. It emphasises the holistic treatment of research phenomenon, maintaining that to understand phenomena requires looking at a wide sweep of contexts: temporal and spatial, historical, political, economic, cultural, social, and personal (Stake 1995:37).

The approach views surface similarities (in the form of daily behavioural uniformity that is observed amongst a group of teachers and students) as an illusion. These similarities are not to be treated as evidence of an underlying essential uniformity. Through culture, we share learned systems for interpreting meaning, and this results in similar behavioural responses. These similar responses (as surface similarities) mask an underlying diversity. Thus, in a given situation, one cannot assume that the same behavioural acts of two individuals hold the same meaning to both people. It is the meaning interpretations accompanying the actions that are important. Interpretive research makes the crucial analytical distinction between

behaviour (the physical act) and action (behaviour plus meaning interpretations of actor). The objective of such research is action, not behaviour: the focus is on not only what actors do but what they believe they are doing, and why they do what they do.

The interpretive researcher studies the structuring of social ecology by seeking to understand the ways in which teachers and students, in their actions together, constitute environments for each other. The reality of local organisation at the classroom level has to be accommodated with the reality of external pressures on the organisation of the classroom microculture. Research needs to encompass both realities theoretically and empirically. Links are explored between the local lives of students and teachers, inside and outside the classroom, to non-local and general aspects of social structure and culture by looking out from the classroom to the wider world, as well as looking into the classroom from the wider world.

### ***3.4.3. It is impossible to distinguish causes from effects since 'all entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping'.***

Actions are rarely attributable to a single cause. Stake (1995:37) sees the understanding of human actions as a matter of chronologies more than of causes and effects. According to Erickson (1986:125), the most basic difference between the interpretive and other approaches to CR is the ways in which these approaches attempt to account for the nature of cause in human social relations.

“Causal explanation in the domain of human social life cannot rest simply upon observed similarities between prior and subsequent behaviours, even if the correlations among those behaviours appear to be very strong, and experimental conditions obtain. Rather, an explanation of cause in human action must include identification of meaning-interpretations of the actor.”

Erickson (1986:127)

Causal relations among people are seen as being both complex and multi-directional. From the interpretive perspective it is meaningless to speak of a student's intrinsic ability – there is no such thing because the student is always found in a social environment. The student's performance and the adults' assessments of the student's performance are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping. As one influences the other, we say that the student's assessed ability



is a product of the student's social situation. Instead of being an attribute of that student, it is socially constructed.

#### ***3.4.4. The knower and the known are interactive and inseparable.***

Interpretive research champions the interaction of researcher and phenomena. Researchers do not step outside their ordinary lives when they observe, interpret and write up a qualitative study. Phenomena need accurate description, but even observational interpretation of phenomena is shaped by the mood, experience and intention of the researcher as the researcher interacts with the phenomena under investigation.

“Human construction of knowledge appears to begin with sensory experience of external stimuli. Even at the beginning these sensations are immediately given personal meaning. Although originating in outside action, only the inside interpretation is known. As far as we can tell, nothing about the stimulus is registered in awareness and memory other than our interpretations of it. No aspect of knowledge is purely of the external world, devoid of human construction.”

Stake 1995:100

Interpretive research therefore sees knowledge as constructed rather than discovered, and this construction occurs through interpretation. Research depends on interpretation, but where standard quantitative research designs attempt to limit the role of personal interpretation for that period between the time the research design is set and the time the data is collected, and analysed statistically (sometimes referred to as a value-free period), interpretive research designs call for the researcher to be in the field, to make observations, exercise subjective judgement, to analyse and synthesise. Instead of attempting to make research value-free, this approach sees it as a more realistic and honest goal to acknowledge the presence of the researcher in its research design. Given the intense interaction of the researcher with people in the field, given the constructivist orientation to knowledge described by Stake above, given the attention to participant intentions and sense of self, however descriptive the report, it is inevitable that it ultimately offers the researcher's personal view.

### **3.4.5. Inquiry is value-bound**

In 3.3, I considered the role of how theory influences research questions (or issues) and methodology. CR cannot meaningfully take place without a social theory that underlies observation and interpretation. This section explores the relationship between the personal theories and perspectives of the researcher, and the interpretations that these generate in a sociocultural situation.

“We always bring to experience frames of interpretation, or schemata. From this point of view the task of field work is to become more and more reflectively aware of the frames of interpretation of those we observe, and of our own culturally learned frames of interpretation we brought with us to the setting. This is to develop a distinct view of both sides of the fence.”  
Erickson (1986:140)

Interpretive research seeks to construct the frames of reference of those observed. During this process, the researcher becomes aware of his or her own frames of interpretation. To be able to understand the meaning interpretations of research participants, I have to be keenly aware of how I interpret meaning from within my socio-cultural framework. The researcher's awareness of personal frames of interpretations becomes more defined the more s/he understands the frames of interpretations of those being studied. It is only in knowing another that we come to know ourselves. The reflective researcher comes to know himself better the more he knows his subjects, and comes to know his subjects better the more he knows himself.

Yet, researchers arrive at the research task with preconceptions (in the form of particular theoretical and experiential frames of reference) about the area under investigation. Consciously or unconsciously, researchers begin their studies with an underlying grand theory or model in mind. This theory affects the questions asked, the assumptions made, the data that is considered relevant, and the conclusions drawn. Despite this, grand theories have tended to remain implicit in research. This is however changing as:

“increasingly qualitative researchers are placing themselves within the research design rather than outside of it as supposedly unobtrusive observers.”  
Brown (1995:598)



Rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate the effects of the researcher, Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) propose that we should set about understanding them. Their work reflects their central concern with *reflexivity*, which they define as the recognition that we are part of the social world we study (1983:14). Davis (1995 ) and Pierce (1995b) advocate taking steps towards minimising the extent to which researcher preconceptions affect the study by, as far as is possible, making explicit the social theories and perspectives that shape frames of interpretation and are likely to inform the investigation. This is what the next section does.

### **3.5. Declaring the Researcher's Conceptual Framework and Frames of Reference**

Underlying my study are the nature/nurture grand theories, and critical theory. The discussion now proceeds with an analysis of the first; critical theory is considered later.

#### **3.5.1. Nature / Nurture Grand Theories**

Between them, the nature/nurture grand theories debate if social behaviour is genetically determined (nature grand theory) or socially constructed (nurture grand theory). Drawing on these grand theories, educational researchers have produced middle-range theories or grounded theories to explain school failure. Developed through research, grounded theories are more specific than grand theories but broader in scope than empirical generalisations and causal models (Davis, 1995:438-440). They are often drawn on to explain a whole class of phenomena. A grounded theory is generated from a qualitative study and will:

“fit the situation being researched, and work when put into use . By ‘fit’ we mean that the categories must be readily (not forcibly) applicable to, and be indicated by the data under study. By ‘work’ we mean that they must be meaningfully relevant to and able to explain the behaviour under study.”

Glaser and Strauss (1967:3)

The notion of grounded theory is explained in Davis (1995:440) and is used to account for how pattern models of explanation emerge. Drawing on the work of Diesing (1972) and Reason (1981), Davis explains that the qualitative researcher uses the information that is gathered in the field situation to build a model which serves to describe as well as to explain

the system. This model is built by connecting different themes to make a network or pattern. These connections are discovered empirically rather than inferred logically, and provide an empirical account of the entire system. In explaining the system the account describes the kinds of relations the various parts have to each other. In explaining these relations the researcher accounts for the meaning of a part. This type of explanation is called a *pattern model of explanation*. Some of the middle-range or grounded theories developed from the nature-nurture grand theories that educational researchers use to explain school failure are:

- The *nature theory* which uses genetic deficiency to explain school failure: children fail because they lack genetically determined intelligence.
- The *nurture theory* which challenges the nature theory, proposing instead that children do poorly in school because of cultural deficiencies. The home and community environment of the child fails to provide the kinds of cultural exposure it needs to succeed in school.
- The functionalist *cultural relativist theory* is another response to the nurture theory, claiming that the cultures of the children are not deficient, but simply different from that of the school. Heath's (1983) study is the most widely recognised example of an applied linguistics ethnography. Discussed briefly in 2.4.1(b), Heath looks at language socialisation patterns, paying particular attention to the language and literacy within each of the three communities studied. Using empirical data, she establishes her grounded theory which is a functionalist theory of culturally determined language and literacy behaviour. By comparing the language and literacy expectations of each of the three communities with those of the school, Heath contributes to the home/school cultural difference theory for explaining academic failure.
- *Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural and linguistic capital* is a variant of the cultural relativist theory. Bourdieu explains the differential acquisition of languages and academic performance among working, middle, and upper class children based on how similar or different their home cultures and languages are to that of the school.

Although interpretive studies cannot be generalised across populations, grounded theories (such as functionalist and home/school difference theories) potentially allow for transfer to a wide range of cultures and social situations. Transferability across time and context depends on the degree of contextual similarity the researcher is able to establish through accumulated empirical evidence (Davis 1995:441). The functionalist, cultural relativist theory and the cultural and linguistic capital theory form the basis of my study. They assist me in conceptualising interpretations for I draw on them to interpret and explain observations.

### **3.5.2. Critical Theory as a Grand Theory**

An off-shoot of the more encompassing materialistic theory, critical theory assumes that unequal power relationships operate within society at large and institutions specifically (Davis, 1995:438). Critical research employs ethnographic and philosophical research methods which take into account the power differentials both within society and between the researcher and the researched. While ethnography aims to represent phenomena as they are seen by the individuals being studied, critical theory aims to go a step further by discovering how ultimately things can be changed for the better (Hammersley, 1990:13).

Critical theorists share a number of important tenets which influence the framing, progress and analysis of research. The following is an outline of six of these as listed by Pierce (1995b:570-573) who uses them to describe the theoretical assumptions underlying her doctoral study which investigates the extent to which inequitable relations of power based on gender, ethnicity and class might affect language learning amongst a group of immigrant women in Canada. The first four of these tenets have been mentioned earlier, but are mentioned again here because of how they relate to my study.

#### **Tenet 1:**

Critical research upholds the view that no research can claim to be objective or unbiased. As already mentioned, the production of knowledge cannot be understood apart from the personal histories of the researcher and the larger institutional context in which researchers work. In my study, I was constantly aware that my history and experience as a Singaporean Indian, female researcher, brought up and educated in Singapore, but who had lived abroad in Britain for a few years intersected in diverse and complex ways with the management and progress of the research. My experiences (as learner and teacher), readings, and orientations towards the field influenced the study, so much so that at another place and time, this research would have been differently conceived and differently understood.

#### **Tenet 2:**

Critical researchers are interested in the way individuals as competent practitioners of their everyday worlds, make sense of their own experience. This study focuses on the actualities of what teachers and learners do on a day-to-day basis under definite conditions and in definite situations.

**Tenet 3:**

Critical researchers look at specifics, and these are located in the larger social structure. The study aims to investigate the complex relationship between social structure (as reflected in larger society and the education system) on the one hand, and human agency (as reflected in teachers and learners) on the other, without resorting to deterministic or reductionist analyses.

**Tenet 4:**

Research is located within a historical context. History is not to be relegated to the collection of background data, but instead becomes an integral part of the explanation of the regularities explored in any specifics. Critical research explores how the past and present intersect in peoples' voices and actions. Trappes-Lomax (Personal communication, 1999) refers to this as the '*state of the present-perfect*'. In English, the present perfect tense allows us to represent the fact that our present is made up of our past. At any moment in time, we are the sum of our past negotiating our present. Critical research therefore aims to investigate how, in the classroom, the 'present-perfect' sculpts the conditions and processes involved in coming to know.

**Tenet 5:**

Critical research assumes that inequalities of gender, race, class, and ethnicity produce and are produced by unequal power relations in society. Pierce (1995b:572) argues

“In a world that is clearly unequal, participation and dialogue never just happen. Power relations are clearly at work, differentially positioning students in relation to one another, to the subject matter, and to the teacher”.

This study considers how inequitable relations of power based particularly on role, ethnicity, and class come to bear on the microculture of the class.

**Tenet 6:**

Critical researchers believe that the goal of educational research is educational and social change. There are many possibilities for reducing inequalities in education in particular and society in general. To this end, the greatest challenge for educational researchers is how to frame questions so that research can work towards redressing inequalities in education. I aim to enter the classrooms with the broad goal of studying classroom microculture, and hope

and expect that in this process, I will be able to frame more context-specific research issues that relate to greater educational and social equality.

### 3.6. The Relationship between Ethnography and Culture

Complex societies impose on us the myth of the melting pot (Spradley 1979:12), and the myth of naïve realism whereby all people are assumed to define objects, events, and other people in more or less the same way; that education, homework, and teachers have essentially the same meaning to all human beings. It is however increasingly clear that we do not have a homogeneous culture, and that people who live in complex societies actually live by many different cultural codes. This difference is seen more obviously amongst ethnic groups. However, even occupation groups exhibit cultural differences. Schools have their own cultural systems and within the same institution people see things differently.

We are all, to some extent, imprisoned in our culture. Being culture-bound, we live inside our particular reality that we take as ‘the reality’. When we do and say, we externalise our culture. Within culture, language plays a two-way role: it is a means of communicating about culture and a tool for constructing culture. Wright (1992:90) holds that as “*culture and mental states interact in contexts*” we can access culture through ethnography which is viewed as a type of outdoor psychology in particular localities, where it is assumed that behaviour externalises or reveals ways of perceiving and believing. Because it always implies a theory of culture, ethnography, “*offers one of the best ways to understand these complex features of modern life*” (Spradley 1979:12) by showing the range of cultural differences when people with diverse perspectives interact.

Educational ethnography in language research considers the classroom as a social context, and seeks to describe and understand social and psychological processes within the classroom without pre-determined theoretical notions about these processes. Within L2 classroom research, the concerns of research are the same as those of the SLA approach to classroom interaction – i.e. teacher talk, turn-taking, feedback and error treatment, teacher questions, etc. However, unlike SLA research which deals with classroom interaction as product, educational ethnography deals with classroom interaction as process.

Ethnographic inquiry emphasises interpretation, and the key interpretations to be pursued are those of the people being studied. Yet, because knowledge is perceived as researcher-constructed rather than researcher-discovered, emphasising the interpretations of those being studied leads invariably to an in-built tension between how participants see what they do, and how it appears to the researcher. This is the tension between the emic and the etic or between participation and observation faced by the researcher as s/he constantly attempts to move away from his/her interpretations towards those of his subjects. The emic principle is one of the two guiding principles of ethnography – the other being the holistic principle.

### **3.6.1. Ethnography's Emic Principle**

The emic principle requires the researcher to:

“leave aside pre-established views, standards of measurement, models, schemes, and typologies, and consider classroom phenomena from the functional point of view of the ordinary actor in everyday life” (van Lier 1988:55)

Researchers look for and study the meaning that teachers and students invest and develop within their social context of the classroom, as manifested through their interaction and documentary evidence. The constructivist view of knowledge justifies a great deal of narrative description as the researcher needs to provide readers with a substantial amount of raw material for their own generalising. The emphasis is on description of things that readers ordinarily pay attention to, particularly places, events, and people. Descriptions are not commonplace description but *'thick description'* (Geertz 1973:43) entailing the interpretations of people most knowledgeable about the case. Thick description is provided by interviews, observations, and other forms of data collection within the time-frame necessary for gaining an understanding of the actors' meanings for social actions. It is not complexities objectively described. Erickson calls it *'emic description'*, contrasting it with *'rich'* description which he sees as *"the play by play account of what an observer sees observed persons doing"* (1986:119).

Emic descriptions have to be true to the subjects *and* to the context. Interpretations vary between researcher and subjects, and among subjects as well. Freeman (1995) uses the concept of *'positionality'* to refer to how any knowledge or interpretation can be seen as shaped by privileges and constraints of gender, social class, ethnicity, and personal



background. As the classroom is made up of many subjects, by applying the *concept of the multiple perspective*, the researcher's aim is to create thick descriptions that constitute composite interpretations. I see two ways of arriving at emic descriptions – the first I shall refer to as the perspective of 'truth-as-agreement' and the second as 'truth through observational analysis':

Emic descriptions have to reflect the interpretations and reality of the subjects being studied, and the researcher usually achieves this by first generating researcher-interpretations which are usually triggered by differences between the researcher's culture and that of the participants.

"Those aspects of culture which are simply intolerable are probably the key to the difference between that culture and one's own. The method is not that of 'objectivity', but of 'disciplined subjectivity'."

Adelman (1985:45)

The researcher acknowledges these differences and treats them as points of departure as s/he begins to generate interpretations. The research process continues with the researcher asking the participants pertinent questions, or by speaking to those with 'insider' knowledge, both with the intention of confirming researcher-interpretations. This secures truth agreement.

The second way of creating emic descriptions involves the researcher testing his/her interpretations with more observation and analysis. Other than positioning him/herself, the researcher tries to avoid actually creating situations to test interpretations. The goal is to observe the ordinary, and to observe it long enough so as to comprehend what, for this case, ordinary means.

If a researcher's description of how an event is organised is valid, the participants within that event will, as they interact, orient to its structural features (Mehan 1979:23). Through their actions, they will make the researcher's descriptions visible. The description becomes valid to the extent that it is able to predict interactions and features of the interactions. Conversely, when those expected forms of interaction do not occur, it is expected that this will be signalled by means of interaction hiccups through repair, sanctions etc. Thus the study of the unexpected, the breaking of rules, the breakdown of order, are of special importance since they allow the researcher to test presumed rules and regularities, to see if the participants' tacit rules of conduct match them (van Lier, 1988:63).

Stake describes how he has

“come to expect becoming familiar with an entity by observing how it struggles against constraints, copes with problems. This may be part of my belief that the nature of people and systems become more transparent during their struggles.” (1995:16)

The aim is to try to understand the diverse signs, codes and symbols in the data so as to gradually move closer to the participants' frame of reference. What is significant to the participant becomes significant to the researcher. Geertz likens understanding inner lives to “*grasping a proverb, catching an allusion, seeing a joke...*” Geertz (1983:70). Through personal involvement, the researcher interprets the experience, recognises its contents, puzzles its many meanings, and creates an experiential, naturalistic account for readers to participate themselves in some similar reflection.

Whilst ‘*truth-as-agreement*’ may be a more thorough means of arriving at representative interpretations, ‘*truth through observational analysis*’ is more in tune with the minimum-intervention, fly-on-the-wall approach adopted by this study.

### **3.6.2. *Ethnography's Holistic Principle***

This principle calls for data obtained from the study of parts of the culture to be related to other components of the culture. Thick description has therefore to include

“all relevant and theoretically salient micro and macro contextual influences that stand in a systematic relationship to the behaviour or events one is attempting to explain”

Watson-Gegeo (1992:54)

Such a connectedness relates to the pattern models of explanation described by Davis (1995) in the discussion on nature/nature grand theories in 3.5.1.

## **3.7. Using Ethnography to Study Classroom Culture**

Normality in the L2 classroom is accomplished by its members through their interaction. Saville-Troike sees the central question in the ethnography of communication as:

“What does a speaker need to know to communicate appropriately within a particular speech community, and how does he or she learn?” (1982:2)



Mehan (1979) investigates what makes participants competent members of lessons by describing normal classroom circumstances so as to construct the structuring of a lesson (see 2.8.2). Both deal with what I described in Chapter Two as the culture of the classroom. While 'classroom culture' is an easily understood concept, it is difficult to pin down for study. This study aims to investigate interaction in the classroom so as to answer the question of "How do teachers and students co-construct the implicit and explicit rules according to which the lesson is conducted?"

Allwright (1996) presents a viable approach towards what he sees as a realistic goal of ethnography – credible accounts are not an end in themselves but a viable means towards the "*generally plausible overall picture*". He advises that in order to study the kinds of social and pedagogic pressures that are part of internal socialisation in the classroom,

"...we need to go beyond the transcript into the realms of more subjective, more ethnographic, investigatory techniques. We need more than transcript data. We must expect along the way to lose confidence in the wisdom of hoping to establish credible accounts for particular episodes of classroom discourse, however valuable such episodes may be as initial prompts to fruitful speculation. We will be working towards a generally plausible overall picture rather than towards a highly specific and fully credible account of any particular episode."

Allwright (1996:221)

While ethnography does have the means to answer the question of how teachers and students co-construct the class's implicit and explicit rules, it is however not within the scope of this study to cover how *all* classroom interaction relates to *all* classroom rules and gives rise to classroom culture. For the reason that this study aims to investigate classroom culture by looking at aspects of classroom interaction, and not all of it, the study would be more accurately described as an ethnographically-influenced case study. As methods of inquiry, ethnography and case study research attempt to portray what is going on in a particular setting by going beyond objective accounts of the culture being studied to encapsulate the subjects' point of view using similar data collection methods. However, "*while an ethnography is a complete account of a particular culture, case studies examine a facet or particular aspect of the culture or subculture under investigation*" (Nunan 1992:77).

### 3.7.1. Issues and Issue Questions

In classroom culture research,

“...case and context are infinitely complex and the phenomena are fluid and elusive. In a flood of happenings, the researcher grasps for something to hold on to.”

Stake (1995:33)

This ‘something’ takes the form of issues and issue questions (or statements), that provide the study with a conceptual structure. I use these terms as used by Stake, who differentiates between the conceptual structure provided by hypotheses and statements (of quantitative research) and issues and issue statements (of qualitative research). While the former sharpen the focus and consequently minimise interest in the situation and circumstance, the latter force attention to complexity and contextuality in the case and “*direct the looking and the thinking enough but not too much*” (Stake 1995:16). If the issue question is too precise, the focus is too sharp, and consequently the researcher becomes less open to the peculiarities of the case. While research questions in quantitative research are kept intact, issues in interpretive research emerge, grow and die. The course of such research cannot be charted in advance.

I begin with an extensive inquiry, and systematically reduce the breadth of the inquiry to give more concentrated attention to emergent research issues. I accept that as researcher, I arrive at the site with etic issues, (stemming from experience or relevant literature review) but with time, emic issues (the issues of the participants, those belonging to the case) surface and become more focused. This is what Parlett and Hamilton (1976) call ‘*progressive focusing*’ and means that initial research issues may be modified or even replaced in mid-study. Issues are gradually pared to a few to help structure observations, interviews and general data collection. Work moves back and forth between the study of the larger case (classroom microculture) and the study of the more focused issue (classroom interaction). One informs the other as both case and issues exist in a symbiotic relationship. With the interpretation of meaning, observation is redirected, and if necessary, so is data collection methods and research design in order to refine or substantiate those meanings. Erickson echoes this, saying that

“The central issue of method is to bring research questions and data collection into a consistent relationship, albeit an evolving one.” (1986:140)

The study adopts Cazden’s (1986:434) assumptions and constructs which constitute a guiding framework for observation, data collection and analysis. Cazden sees classroom interaction as governed by context-specific rules which encompass participation structures that allocate rights and obligations for participation. Participation rules are generally, though not always, implicit, and learned through interaction itself. As meaning is context-specific, the same behaviour can have multiple meanings, serving multiple functions. Individuals act through personal frames of reference, and within the class group, frames can converge and diverge.

The study focuses on processes, noting the regularities, idiosyncrasies, and sequence in classroom interaction as they occur, with the aim of deriving implicit rules governing participants’ behaviour. As what participants do in the classroom is influenced by what happens in the wider spheres of social organisation and cultural patterning, the study proposes a dialogue between the micro and macro by proceeding from an analysis of substantive data of classroom interaction to an understanding of local cultural processes in the language classroom in Singapore. In order to generate local theory that accounts for classroom microculture, the study also refers to social forces of the culture outside the classroom in the school itself and further away (the education system and Singapore society in general) which are assumed to impinge upon what happens in the classroom – so as to provide an understanding that is holistic and comprehensive.

In the Singapore context where classrooms are multicultural and multilingual, investigating classroom culture presents a special challenge. Classrooms are “*perceived to be dominated by a didactic pedagogy, reinforced by a common curriculum and frequent assessment*”, all of which act as strong external influences (Yip, 1997:xiv). There is also a perceived need for research focusing on classroom processes as such research is deemed the least well explored aspect of schooling (op cit).

The broad research issue is classroom microculture, with the broad issue question being:

- How, in the two classrooms, do teacher, students, and the macro social context co-construct the classroom microculture?

This is the issue question that I embarked data collection and entered the classroom with. During data collection and analysis however, the study was guided by more specific issue questions:

- How are the classroom microcultures similar, and how are they different?
- How do the ways in which the teachers install classroom procedure, practice classroom management, and deliver procedural instructions shape the microculture of the classroom?

And as a sub-question to this:

How do the ways in which teachers install classroom procedure, practice classroom management, and deliver procedural instructions affect student questioning behaviour?

The chapter now turns to a consideration of issues related to data analysis.

### **3.8. Data Analysis: Some important theoretical considerations**

This section installs a framework which will be used by the study to present, analyse, and discuss data. The framework encompasses theoretical considerations of data analysis, and aims to clarify to the reader the tools of data analysis, as well as the reasons behind the use of these tools. It also familiarises the reader with terminology and constructs fundamental to the data discussion.

#### ***3.8.1. Key Components in the Presentation of Research Findings***

Erickson (1986, 150-152) lists and describes three crucial components of the presentation of research findings. These are particular descriptions, general descriptions and interpretive commentary. Data analysis in this study uses all three. For descriptions of research findings to be credible, they have to:

- provide richness of detail through particular description,
- establish the generalisability of findings within the study through general description, and
- offer analyses of meaning of actions from the perspectives of the actors in the event through interpretive commentary.

**Particular descriptions** ground and contextualise assertions. They are used as building blocks that constitute and support abstract assertions. By providing representative samples of general assertions, particular descriptions provide evidence that a valid analysis has been made of what the events mean. These descriptions can take the form of narrative vignettes of events, quotations and extended discourse. Narrative vignettes are narrative accounts in story form, and are vivid portrayals of *“the conduct of everyday life, in which the sights and sounds of what was being said and done are described in the natural sequence of their occurrence in real time”* (Erickson 1986:150). They are personalistic descriptions providing rich ingredients for vicarious experience, while grounding and contextualising assertions.

**General descriptions** demonstrate the generalisability of patterns within the data corpus. I shall use general description to indicate frequency through the use of descriptive terminology, showing patterns of distribution of instances of behaviour.

**Interpretive commentary** is crucial in that it frames the reporting of both particular and general description. In presenting descriptive data, I shall begin by first providing a brief commentary on what the sample of data reveals as a representative of the assertion being made. A longer interpretive commentary following the data sample both explains and interprets the specific sample. Moving a step back for a wider perspective, I shall use further interpretive commentary to frame the sample in a theoretical discussion that points to the more general significance of the assertion or the pattern that the sample is representative of.

### **3.9. Culture and Language: Locating the ‘voice’ of the researcher in representations of culture**

The style of writing through which data analysis is presented in this study is influenced by the work of educational ethnographer Lilie Chouliaraki. According to Chouliaraki (1977:8), because cultures *“do not sit still for their portraits”* their representation is truer if it brings out their ambiguity and indeterminacy through interpretations that are left open and suspended. By definition, culture is never static. I take classroom culture *not* as a fixed set of rules, relationships and structures to be registered and described, but more as a process, emergent and in flux.

In representing culture, the researcher is both interpreter and writer, engaging in both actions. The writing reflects this action if it adopts an active voice (instead of the passive one which has the effect of distancing and impersonalising). The report, along with the fact that what I write is my interpretation of the data, therefore aims for a transparent style.

Yet, while a transparent style can be targeted, language itself is not and never transparent. Viewing language as social practice, as discourse, means that language is not innocent in its representations of social reality. There is never transparency of representation and immediacy of experience. The very focus of text-making and rhetoric reflect and highlight the constructed, artificial nature of cultural accounts. No account of the field can claim to tell 'the truth' about its reality, and thus social events cannot truly be objectively described.

"We must not lose sight of the fact that reports are constructions - the texts we produce are representations of the phenomena they attempt to portray, not the phenomena themselves, and thus there is a sense in which all reports are fictions"

(Atkinson 1991:171).

More specifically, texts are always partial truths, inevitably constructed through particular points of view, particular vested interests which select and foreground certain aspects of reality rather than others. The author does therefore have a privileged part to play in the construction of the text; writing is discursive; and all representation is partial. To counter balance these, the researcher needs to write with a historically and culturally situated voice, instead of with an all-knowing voice, or perhaps more dangerous, an absent voice. The text is therefore more honestly presented as a cultural practice, instead of an ultimate truth.

### **3.9.1. *Realist Fictions and Polyphonic Representations***

Chouliaraki (1997) proposes a style of writing that aims for firstly '*realist fiction*' and secondly, '*polyphonic representations*'. For '*realist fiction*', it is necessary for the writer to explicate his/her theoretical point of view and foreground it as a particular narrative stance - whilst acknowledging that it is not the only point of view. The latter is done by emphasising the active role of the author in constructing the narrative. Brodkey (1987:71) proposes that the author do this by interrupting the story-telling during narration so as to draw attention to his/ her own voice, thereby also drawing the reader's attention to the partiality of his or her views. She refers to this as the '*interrupted narrative*'.



Apart from this, the researcher creates polyphonic representations by constructing the text through the plurality of voices it consists of, instead of through only a single-voiced description. This stems from the view of culture as constituted by multiple voices co-existing in a continuous dialogue among them – voices expressing personal views within their cultural interactions.

This particular manipulation of time as ‘frozen’ (through the interrupted narrative) and of voices as if simultaneously articulated, is crucial as it presents a conceptualisation of classroom culture as in a constant dialogue, perceiving teachers and students as multi-faceted and dynamic. Through juxtaposing and counter-posing the voices of classroom participants of their different agendas, drawn from a range of situations and across time and referring to a particular theme, the culture of the classroom is presented as being in a continuous movement of dialogue and conflict. Thus, the interrupting authorial voice intersects and comments from a critical point of view, bringing out possible interpretations while trying not to impose one line of thought onto the text (Chouliaraki 1997:14). Thick descriptions are therefore not just accounts but analyses, and within the details of a story are contained a statement of a theory of organisation and meaning of events described. Through interpretive commentary in the form of the interrupted narrative, the writer articulates this theory and meaning.

### **3.10. Summary**

This chapter, with Chapter Two, completes the discussion of relevant literature pertaining to research topic and methodology. These chapters have laid the necessary foundations for the study by locating it within a theoretical and methodological framework. Chapter Four moves away from a review of literature to look at the study itself. It presents a detailed description and discussion of the planned research design, and the implementation of this design during actual data collection and data analysis.





## **Chapter 4. Research Design, Data Collection & Data Analysis**

### **4.1. Introduction**

Chapters Two and Three presented the theory and methodology that frame this study. This chapter discusses the study itself. It begins with a statement of research issues before describing the research design. A significant portion of the chapter focuses on describing the actual processes of data gathering, and data analysis.

“Fieldwork is rarely as easily achieved as final written-up accounts would have us believe.”  
(Wright, 1992:122)

The chapter illustrates this. I describe the blind alleys I occasionally arrived at, and how these prompted changes in research design in terms of instruments of data collection. I also describe data analysis, beginning with on-site initial impressionistic analysis, followed by an account of how analysis proceeded once away from the fieldwork context. The chapter presents the reader with a sense of what it was like to be collecting data, and of what it was like to be faced with a sea of data to piece together for analysis. It also illustrates what happened when a planned research design met with the realities of firstly, the fieldwork situation, and later, data analysis.

### **4.2. Original Research Design**

Due to the wide, encompassing nature of classroom culture, it was felt that the data collecting net should, initially at least, be cast on a wide front. This was to be combined with an approach that was, as much as was realistically possible, non-interventional. The intention was to observe without disturbing the ordinary event, whether this activity was a lesson, or a discussion amongst teachers and students outside lessons. I aimed to not ask directly for information that could be acquired through discrete observation or examination of records. The nature of the study called for data gathering to be flexible enough to allow for on-site modification - according to the specifics of the fieldwork context, initial data collection and analysis.

I planned to collect sufficient data – mostly in the form of thick descriptions – to compose a picture of classroom culture that would reflect the perspectives and understandings of its participants. For this, it was necessary to record classroom interactions long and thoroughly enough so that norms and routines could be identified. Later re-constructions of events could only be credible if data collection was thorough. I hoped that data analysis would reveal how norms and routines come to be established by teachers and students, and how these relate to the classroom microculture. On a more general level, I wanted to observe the running of the school, so as to describe the larger school culture within which the two classes were located.

In order to increase data credibility, data collection would employ triangulation, which is the application and combination of several research methods to study the same phenomena such that these diverse methods and measures relate in some specified way to the theoretical constructs under examination (Denzin 1984). Data collection methods or techniques have their built-in weaknesses and inadequacies. Observation, for example, has the problem of dealing with rival interpretations. This aside, social meanings to the observer and those observed, are often different, capturing different perspectives of the same phenomena. A more fruitful search for sound interpretations of social phenomena relies therefore upon triangulation strategies as interpretations generated from such strategies are likely to be stronger than those that rest on the more constricted framework of a single method. To this end, the study combines a range of data collection methods to form a single, coherent methodological position. The plan was to begin to negotiate access to a school and to two class groups within the school so as to:

- observe (and audio-record) all English language lessons of two classes for a minimum duration of four weeks
- interview (and audio-record) students and teachers
- collect samples of students' written work
- collect supplementary or supporting data about students, classes and the school which would include:
  - information about the general academic performance of students in national exams, and their socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds
  - descriptions (including photographs) of the classrooms, the staff room and the school
  - interviews with key staff members such as the Principal, Head of Department, discipline master/mistress, school counsellor etc.
  - supplementary documents such as the school yearbook

With the research design drawn up, there was also a realisation that I could never be completely prepared: that because the actual school and classes were unknown, they would present me with the unfamiliar. It was of vital importance that I arrive at the scene relatively open-minded, ready to soak up anything that happens (Stake 1995:55). I needed to be open to unanticipated happenings that lay beyond my imagination, and that would reveal the nature of the case, and present the study with (new) issues. New issues would lead to progressive focusing, and, as tentative interpretations generate the need for interpretation-testing, the research design would be modified to enable more and adequate evidence to be gathered in the cyclical process of research.

### **4.3. A Discussion of Key Features of the Study**

#### **4.3.1. *Beginning Data Collection in January***

The school year in Singapore begins on January 2nd, consists of four terms (each ten weeks long) and ends in November. There is a one-week vacation between the first and second terms and another between the third and fourth terms. A four-week break follows the mid-year school examinations. A long vacation of six weeks occurs at the end of the year, after the final examinations.

In order to record the coming about of “*normal routines*” (as used by Wright 1992) of classroom culture, it was essential for data collection to begin when students and teacher - as strangers to each other - first formed a class. In a secondary school this would happen in secondary one when students arrive from primary schools around Singapore. The first few weeks of teacher-student interactions are possibly more eventful than later in the year when classroom culture is likely to be more established. Seen in this light, beginning observations in January would provide me with the opportunity of capturing the birth of classroom culture, as I followed its evolution over the first few important weeks.

Intensive observations would enable me to consider how what happens in one lesson affects what happens in the next. Cohen and Manion (1994) use the term ‘*developmental research*’ to refer to research that is concerned with describing the nature of present relationships among variables in a given situation, and accounting for changes occurring in those relationships over time. They see the term ‘developmental’ as “*primarily biological, having*

*to do with the organisation and the life processes of living things*" (1994:67). Observing consecutive lessons therefore gives the study a developmental slant.

#### **4.3.2. Duration of Fieldwork**

It was felt that a ten-week access to the fieldwork context (Term One: Tuesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> January – Friday 9<sup>th</sup> March) would allow sufficient time for interviews, attendance of school functions, and the general collection of data on a wide front. All encounters with staff and students of the school would be treated as opportunities for eliciting data. I planned to audio-record where possible and to make extensive field notes of encounters.

A term would also hopefully provide the time needed to acquire more of a 'fly-in-the-wall' status amongst the teachers and students. This was based on the assumption that the longer I was there, the less obvious I would become, allowing teachers and students to get on with their daily tasks less aware of my presence, and of being observed and audio-recorded.

#### **4.3.3. Selection of a Secondary School**

Although there are four types of secondary schools in Singapore, (see Chapter 5.8), my study would be conducted in the most common kind of school. Such a school is government-run, and - in its set-up, its student population composition, and in terms of the results of its students at the national General Certificate Exams - would be a typical average secondary school.

#### **4.3.4. Reasons for Studying Two Classes**

There is meaning in difference, and we are better able to characterise an entity when it is juxtaposed against another. Through a build up of similarities and differences between two entities, we create an outline that helps to define both.

Classroom culture is a wide construct that encompasses all that can happen in the classroom, and is therefore overwhelming to work with. Hence, to render my task less daunting and more achievable, I planned to study the co-construction of classroom culture in two classes

in the same level, in the same school. I hoped that juxtaposition would allow similarities and differences between the two classes to surface, so that comparisons could be made. These comparisons would highlight aspects of each class's microculture, and these aspects would function as start points for data analysis, providing me with specific classroom interactions or events to look at.

#### **4.3.5. A Top-end and a Tail-end Class**

I intended to compare and contrast the microcultures of a top-end and tail end class. These classes are differentiated only in terms of the academic competence of its students, a competence determined by student performance at national examinations all students must sit for at the end of primary six.

The rationale behind having two such classes is as follows: through their words and actions as they interact with their teacher, students play their part in the co-construction of classroom culture. The extent and nature of student interaction is heavily dependent on their linguistic competence. In the English language classroom, this competence allows students to ask questions and to generally negotiate the lesson with the teacher. I aimed to study the ways in which students – different in terms of general academic attainment and language proficiency - participated in the co-construction of classroom culture. I was interested in exploring how different academic levels would or could come to bear on the roles students adopted as they co-constructed classroom culture with their teacher.

#### **4.4. Negotiating Site Entry**

This section provides a narrative description of how access was negotiated to the school, henceforth referred to as School-X, and to the two English language classes. The description covers three main themes: the difficulty faced in gaining entry; my general lack of power as a researcher in the fieldwork situation; and (the subsequent) modification of research design.

I understood that the process of data gathering, as with all such educational research, would involve an invasion of personal privacy. In my requests to the Ministry of Education (henceforth referred to as MOE), and to the school Principal, I explained the nature of the

study (in terms of the primary issues being looked at and the activities intended); the fact that I was self-sponsored; the duration of the study; and the burden to the parties involved. I also discussed plans for the distribution of the final report, explaining who would read the final thesis. I wrote to the MOE with a brief outline of my research intentions and a recommendatory letter from the Head of Applied Linguistics in Edinburgh. The MOE was quick to grant its approval on three conditions: I had to follow the original proposed research study; to not publish my findings without clearance from MOE; and to submit a copy of the final report to the MOE on completion of my study. I was informed that I should “*get the consent of the principal of the school I had selected before commencing the study*”.

I intended to arrive in Singapore in December, to negotiate access to the school at a meeting with its principal, and to meet the two teachers of my study at the annual staff meeting, which takes place at the end of December. At this meeting teachers are informed of their workload and teaching schedules for the following year. They are also told if they will be form-teachers and the extra-curricular activities they will be in-charge of. Attendance at this meeting is compulsory for all teachers. I planned to select the two classes that I wanted to study before this meeting, to meet the English language teachers of these classes for the first time at this meeting, and to arrange to meet them for an interview before I began lesson observations. Timing was tight, but as I had submitted the research proposal in September 1995, not beginning data collection in January 1996 would, because of the nature of the study, mean waiting a full year.

While I assumed that the MOE’s approval would help open doors to Singapore schools, I did not expect to secure either the school or the two classes easily. I knew there would be some resistance from Principals and teachers. “*The observer poses a threat to the teacher’s power base*” (Allwright and Bailey, 1991:69). Having been a teacher myself, I realised how teachers generally consider having an outsider in the classroom a threat to the very delicate but crucial relationship between teacher and the class.

In December, when I telephoned a school to request an appointment with the Principal, it was with some difficulty that I eventually managed to get beyond the secretary to speak directly with the Principal. Upon hearing that I had the MOE’s permission to do research, the his prompt reply was:

*“We already have enough of that kind of thing going on in our school. I think you have to look for another school.”*



He had not even heard of the nature of my research, nor did he, for he then put the telephone down. I was surprised at how the Ministry's approval had not made any difference to the Principal. I tried a few more schools and when I received similar responses, I realised that negotiating access was going to be far more difficult than I had expected. Two days later, I managed to arrange an appointment with a Principal. At our meeting, after explaining the nature of my research, I tried to reassure him that I would minimise interference. An hour later, he agreed that while my research project could yield important results, he could not allow me into his classrooms as this would not be well-received by his staff.

At home, later that day, I managed to arrange another meeting with a Principal who said that he could only see me immediately. It was a huge relief when he told me a few minutes into the meeting that he strongly believed in research. Upon hearing the details of the research project, he said that he found it interesting and agreed to my conducting research in his school.

I was informed that there were only four secondary one classes. This was disappointing, as the gap in academic ability between the top-end and bottom-end classes could not possibly be as wide as say between the first and the last class in a school with seven class groups. I had to choose two classes from the four, which were labelled 1A, 1B, 1C and 1D. 1A and 1B were Express stream classes, 1C was the Normal Academic class and 1D was the Normal Technical class<sup>4</sup>. As I needed a top and a bottom-end class, Class 1D was definitely to be selected as the latter. I then had to choose between 1A and 1B. As some of Class 1A's English periods clashed with those of Class 1D, Class 1B was selected as the second class. I felt more secure with my decision when the Principal informed me that the students in 1A had not necessarily obtained higher T-scores than those of 1B. Students who had qualified for the Express stream had been distributed between these two classes so that these classes would be evenly balanced in terms of gender, race and grades. Although not part of the original research design, the fact that I would be studying the microcultures of two classes from two different academic streams lent a new slant to the study. I would now be able to study the effect (if any) of streaming on the co-construction of classroom culture.

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<sup>4</sup> These three different educational streams, which are related to t-scores obtained by students in a national exam, are explained in Chapter Five.

The Principal informed me of the two teachers that had been assigned to teaching these classes English (henceforth referred to as TB (teacher in-charge of Class 1B) and TD (teacher in-charge of Class 1D). He would introduce me to them two days later, at the end-of-year meeting. When I asked if I could attend this meeting, I was told that it was only for staff, and that I should arrive at 10.30 a.m., when the meeting was expected to end.

#### **4.4.1. First Meeting with Teachers**

I arrived on the 29<sup>th</sup>, and met the Principal half an hour later than planned. He apologised, explaining that he had forgotten that our meeting was at 10.30. He took me to the staff-room where his teachers, having just returned from the meeting, were having refreshments supplied by the Principal as a goodwill welcome-back gesture. He introduced me to TD, telling her that I was going to carry out research in the school, and adding that if she "*did not mind*", I would be attached to her class. With that, he moved off to speak to another teacher.

This caught me off guard as I had assumed that he would have already spoken to the two teachers regarding my study. I explained the research project, reassuring TD that I was more interested in her students, not her teaching. She replied that as a new teacher to the school and the level, (she had not taught secondary one students in many years), she wondered if she would be the right teacher to observe. She expressed her discomfort at being observed, but said that because the Principal had already given the go-ahead, she was not in a position to deny me access to her classes and would instead co-operate by "*giving it a try*". Interestingly, she added that as she would also be teaching the secondary fours (who had national exams to sit for at the end of the year) she had decided to focus her attentions on them, and would base her lessons with Class D on the textbook.

When we parted the Principal came up to me, and asked TB to approach us. He introduced us, and then said to me, "*Why don't you ask her?*" as he walked off to speak to another teacher. I was speechless for a few moments for TB had no idea of what I was about to say. I explained my research project, saying finally how I wanted to observe strangers becoming a class – her class. She said she would think about it, and excused herself to speak to a teacher who was walking by.

I had expected to speak to both these teachers at a more private meeting, initially at least with the Principal, where I would be able to explain the project with as little intimidation as

possible. I wanted to reassure them that they were not going to be assessed, and to try and secure their co-operation. I had not expected the Principal to do as he had done. Perhaps I should have been more specific with him about how I wanted to be introduced to the teachers. But I was new to research, and respectful of the Principal's position of authority, and did not think it was appropriate for me to tell him how I wished or expected to be introduced to his teachers.

I walked around the staff-room, mentally noting what was where, locating the desks of my two teachers, and observing what they and other teachers were doing. Most were busy setting up their desks after their holidays, wiping off dust, making comments about their teaching load for the new year, etc. Some looked at me with curiosity. I wondered if, standing where I was, I was perhaps invading someone's space. No one asked me who I was, or what I was there for. It would perhaps have been easier for me if the Principal had introduced me to his staff, so that they would feel more comfortable with my presence, and I would feel more comfortable in their territory.

Half an hour later, TB approached me, asking me what exactly I planned to do at her lessons. I inferred that I was going to be allowed access to her class. As I was telling her that I needed to observe every English lesson for the first few weeks of the year, TD approached us. Both teachers were keen to know how long they would be observed. I asked, somewhat tentatively, if a month would be possible. When they commented that this was too long, I proposed that we aimed for three weeks, and if, by the end of that, I felt that I had had enough material to work with, I would stop lesson observations. They agreed, and I asked if I could interview them separately before school began. Both said they were too busy for this. They did however agree to an interview at a later date as the year progressed when things were more settled. Before we parted, I presented both teachers with a letter that explained more about the study and me. I told them to read it at their own leisure, and to feel free to ask any questions whenever they had the time.

It was fast becoming apparent that the principal was making himself unpopular with some of his staff by allowing me into their classrooms; that I was rather powerless to make demands on any one's time; and that I had to accept what was given. While I was grateful to have secured access to School-X and to two classes, the research design had to be modified. Lesson observations would be over three instead of four weeks. I also realised that I would

have limited access to the teachers for interviews or general discussions, and wondered how this would affect the study.

## **4.5. Collecting Data**

In response to Allwright's (1996:221) call for CR to go beyond the transcript into the realms of more subjective and ethnographic, investigatory techniques (see 3.7), the study works towards establishing a generally plausible overall picture instead of a highly specific and fully credible account of particular episodes of classroom discourse. As a means towards this end, the study adopts an empirical method, using a range of data-gathering tools typical of an ethnographer's methodological baggage. These are discussed in this section.

Data collection began during the first meeting with the Principal in his office, as I listened to descriptions of the school, staff and students, and observed how he dealt with students and teachers who interrupted us during our meeting. I saw the school through the fresh eyes of an outsider, noticing on my arrival, what was written on banners hanging on school walls, and what was displayed on notice boards (to be described in 5.16.1). I made notes of these, but more focused and structured data collection began with lesson observations.

### **4.5.1. Lesson Observations**

The first lesson observation was on Thursday, January 4<sup>th</sup>, and the last was on Friday, January 26<sup>th</sup> 1996. The first lesson observed was unfortunately not the first, but the second lesson both classes had with their teacher. This is because the teachers together expressed their prefer to have their first meeting with their class without me. When I first entered each class, the teacher explained to the students that I was there to observe their lessons, and that they were to carry on as they would normally. Reactivity was inevitable. Allwright and Bailey define this as "*an alteration in the normal behaviour of a subject under observation, due to the observation itself*" (1991:71). But I hoped that, with intensive observations, the class would feel more at ease with my presence, and reactivity would be minimised. I also made myself available before and after observations and maintained an openness to the participants of the study. In total, I observed and audio-recorded 12 lessons (of 18 periods) with Class B and 16 lessons (of 24 periods) with Class D. Each period was 35 minutes in

length. These recordings, like those of the interviews, provided relatively incontestable data for analysis and reporting.

I positioned myself at the back of the classroom, occupying a student desk in the corner. I felt that it would be a less conspicuous position, allowing me to observe the lesson without distracting the students or disrupting the lesson. CR is characterised by "*a focus on a particular setting... the classroom, and a commitment to respect the integrity of that setting*" (van Lier, 1988:14). Interfering with the normal procedure of the lesson would be detrimental to the study, and as a non-participant observer at the back of the classroom, interaction with participants - including eye-contact - would be minimal. Interestingly, positioned as I was at a learner's desk, it was easier to identify with learners, for example when they were lost as to what they had to do, or when they had not heard teacher instructions. At such times, I became one of them, briefly entering their world.

Whenever possible, the recording equipment was set up before the teacher entered the class, and recording began when students rose to greet her. I had on my desk two microphones, a tape recorder<sup>5</sup> and a notebook. I had decided on audio recording instead of video recording so as to keep intrusion to the minimal. Generally, recording proceeded smoothly, although mid-way through the study, the control knob to one of the two microphones stopped functioning. The recordings were however not significantly affected.

In order to render the later process of transcription easier and to make transcriptions more accurate, I made field notes during observations that recorded significant phenomena that would not be captured by the audio recording. These notes covered qualitative (in the form of narrative accounts and commentaries) and quantitative information (in the form of the number of students raising their hand, how much time was spent on an activity, etc.). Pre-formatted observation forms were not used because these can be powerful, restricting, conceptual organisers. Instead, the page in the notebook was divided into two columns, one much narrower than the other. On the top of the page and above the wider column I wrote details that would help me to later identify the lesson such as the class, date, and time. Under these, I described the lesson opening in terms of what teachers and students did. In the narrow column I wrote the exact time at which the lesson began (when recording started)

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<sup>5</sup> My recording equipment, borrowed from the Language and Humanities Centre, University of Edinburgh, constituted of: a *Sony* cassette recorder (TC-DS PRO II) and two microphones (*Shure* SM 90 Flat Bed Microphone and a *Realistic* PZM Flat Bed Microphone)

along with the counter number (000) of the recorder. As the lesson progressed, I continued to fill this column with details of the time and counter numbers alongside descriptive notes in the wider column so that during transcription, I would have a sense of timing with regards to what was happening when.

The observation notes I made covered teacher and student movements (including descriptions of what the teacher wrote on the blackboard; and student reactions) as well as descriptions of sources of ambient sounds (from neighbouring classes, over flying aeroplane etc.) The notes also attempted to identify students as they moved, or spoke. I did not know their names, nor could I see their faces. But as they regularly occupied the same seat, in my notes I referred to them via a labelling system based on an alphabet plus number combination (determined by the position of the student desk in class). 'A5' for example would refer to the student seated in the extreme right column of desks, in row five (just in front of me). This was later matched against a class seating-plan to obtain the name of the student.

It was necessary to, as far as was possible, suspend my normal preconceptions on entry into the classroom. This would enable the social meanings and lived experiences of teachers and students to determine the primary focus of the study. Inherent in such meanings are the conditions or relationships that exist; practices that prevail; beliefs, points of views, or attitudes that are held; processes that are going on; effects that are being felt; or trends that are developing (Best 1970).

Before entering the classrooms, I had nevertheless drawn up two lists, one of student behaviour and the other of teacher behaviour, which could in some way, (whether as determinant or product) relate to classroom culture. These lists made me aware of my preconceptions, what I expected to find intuitively, and the phenomena I was predisposed to see. The lists however also prepared me for the scope of observable behaviour, to be open to phenomena, and to guard against the blinkered vision my intuitions would naturally set up.

### **Student Behaviour**

How do they greet their teacher?

How attentive are they to the teacher when she is teaching, and when she is not?

How attentive are they to their classmates?

What do they do when they do not understand the teacher's explanations?



How do they initiate questions?

How do they use tone, eye contact, and gesture in communications with the teacher?

How do they react to class work and homework?

How do they respond to group work?

### **Teacher Behaviour**

How does she explicitly lay down rules by which lessons will be conducted?

Does she adhere to, or enforce class rules?

Do these rules change over time? How are they modified? Who modifies them?

Does the teacher conduct lessons according to rules that not first made explicit?

How are teacher-questions worded? When are they asked?

How are students nominated to respond? Are pointing and naming practices employed?

How are student questions/explanations/suggestions responded to?

How does the teacher use individual, pair and group work?

How does she use eye contact, gestures and body language to convey (in)formality?

To what extent is her language directive?

What happens when rules are violated, as when a student talks during teacher-talk, or when homework is not done, etc.)? How is the situation handled?

The list above includes several references to rules. Rule-breaking prompts the breakdown of order, and I see such episodes as *classroom culture moments* for what they are able to illuminate. For Stake (1995:16), "*the nature of people and systems becomes more transparent during their struggles*". I expect to become familiar with an entity by observing how it struggles against constraints, and copes with problems. This echoes van Lier's point (see 3.6.1) on the importance of studying the unexpected for it allows the researcher to test presumed rules and regularities to see if they match participants' tacit rules of conduct.

### **4.5.2. Intensive Student Interviews**

A fundamental goal of qualitative research is to discover and portray the multiple views of the case and the interview is the main route to multiple realities. A large part of any culture consists of tacit knowledge for we all know things that we cannot talk about or express in direct ways. Both tacit and explicit culture are revealed through speech, whether in casual comments or in lengthy interviews (Spradley 1979:9). The objective was to make use of what is said by insiders as they sought to describe their culture. The purpose of the



interviews was to prompt students into describing episodes, so that I could form linkages, and derive explanations of classroom culture (Stake 1995, Payne 1951).

Interviews began in the second week of school, and were conducted with groups of three students (all boys or girls) at a time, until the end of February. In the original research design, I had not specified that boys and girls would be interviewed separately, but classroom observations had shown that these students had a strong gender awareness, and so it was felt that it would be more effective if they were interviewed separately. Interviews were held after school, in classrooms, with four of us sitting around a student table, and lasted about 40 minutes each. In all, I conducted eight interviews, four with each class.

The interviews were semi-structured, in the sense that each interview explored predetermined issues (and for this, I had prepared a list of issue-related questions which were not always used). Students were free to talk around issues, to explore what they felt was relevant to them. The same issues were discussed with students of both classes in the same week. During interviews, main questions were kept in mind, probes sometimes used, and the 'dumb' question occasionally asked – if only to assure that what was said was said. Some of the issues covered were:

- Feelings for the new school
- Past English lessons
- Past English teachers
- Reactions to present English teacher and lessons, etc.
- Attitudes to English, to learning the language, etc.

Interviews sometimes focused on what had happened earlier in the day during English lessons. Nunan (1992:94) defines '*stimulated recall*' as a research technique where "*the researcher records and transcribes parts of the lesson and then gets participants to comment on what was happening at the time that the teaching and learning took place*". This technique can yield insights into processes of teaching and learning which are difficult to obtain through other means, and which provide clarification through subject interpretations. Clarifying interpretations through member checks works against researcher-bias and researcher manufacture of data (Dey 1993:15).

Interestingly, while students of Class D eagerly volunteered to be interviewed, Class B students were not as forthcoming. I thought they were not keen until I was told by one of

them that they were eager to be interviewed but were too shy to appear so. I therefore had to select Class B students from the class register. I had also planned to carry on interviews for as long as possible. However, by the end of February, it became apparent that students were losing the enthusiasm they had displayed earlier in the year. The novelty of being recorded was fast wearing off, and it became increasingly difficult to secure interviewees.

#### **4.5.3. Teacher Interviews**

Both EL teachers were interviewed once, and both interviews occurred after lesson observations ended, and in the first week of February, in the school library. Teachers were asked about their linguistic and educational background, and to comment on:

- class EL textbooks
- the different educational streams
- different teaching methodologies
- teaching at School-X
- support within the department
- students in their class
- discipline issues
- their opinions regarding qualities of a good language learner

#### **4.5.4. Student Questionnaires**

I had originally expected to obtain from teachers's files and class registers information on students's social and linguistic background. However, by the end of lesson observations, I realised that this would not be possible as the teachers and the Vice-Principal were reluctant to provide me with more information than was absolutely necessary. The study was modified on-site to include a student questionnaire that would provide the desired data. Also, as lesson observations by that point had sensitised me to the emergent research issues of teacher instructions and student questions, the questionnaire was designed to enable data triangulation. I attempted to use the questionnaire to consolidate interpretations and explanations, and to check if how students behaved (i.e. what I observed them do in class) corresponded with what they *said* they would do (during interviews), and what they *wrote* in the questionnaire. The questionnaire sought data on:

- socio-economic and linguistic background
- opinions, expectations, and attitudes regarding being students at School-X, being in their class and academic streams
- attitudes, values and practices regarding learning English
- opinions regarding their EL teacher, and EL lessons
- attitudes towards punishment and homework; opinions regarding lesson rules such as having to use only English

The questionnaire was piloted with four students who together covered the range of academic ability encountered in both classes. They were asked to complete the questionnaire with me sitting with them so that they could ask me questions whenever they encountered a question they were not sure of. Through this I simplified several questions, breaking them down into sub-questions, thereby making the questionnaire more manageable for the students.

The questionnaire was administered to both classes over two English periods (together seventy minutes long), on the same day in the middle of February. I instructed students on what they had to do, encouraging them to answer the questions as honestly as possible. Upon reading the completed questionnaires, I realised that some questions had not been answered, and some responses were vague. I knew, because of our contact at interviews, that responses were not as thorough as they could have been. They had responded using black-inked pens. I queried some of their responses using a blue-inked pen, asking further questions that sought clarification. The questionnaires were then re-administered a few days later, with the aim of maximising data quality. Students were told not to erase or change their original responses, but to add to them if they so wanted using a green-inked pen that I supplied them with. They were also told to write, if they preferred, in their L1, which in this case, was predominantly Malay.

#### **4.5.5. Student Diaries**

I had, as I was drafting the research design, considered getting students to keep diaries about their English lessons, but wondered if I would be allowed this. I was pleased when I learnt that the head of the English department had just initiated a school-wide project whereby all students were to keep a diary for English. Students were told to decorate the cover of an

ordinary school exercise book that was to become their diary. English language teachers were to collect diaries every week, usually on Monday, and were to read and respond to entries without correcting them. At the end of fieldwork, after ten weeks, these diary entries, along with diary covers were photocopied. Although they were read, I had to eventually exclude them from data analysis due to the sheer breadth of data that had been collected.

#### **4.5.6. Student Compositions**

During lesson observations, I saw that some of the composition topics set by the EL teachers were relevant to my study. I asked for access to composition exercise books so that I could photocopy all compositions that had been written by the end of term one. Examples of composition topics are:

- My Childhood Experiences
- My Favourite Teacher
- My English Teacher
- My Holidays

This data, like student diaries above, was excluded from data analysis for the same reasons.

#### **4.5.7. Data for Context**

Data was gathered to compile information about the social context of the school. Such data included:

- Audio-recorded interviews with key staff such as the Principal; the Discipline Master; the head of the English department; and the teacher in-charge of pastoral care
- Notes of informal conversations in the staff-room and canteen with staff and students (I frequently had tea breaks and lunch in the canteen with the Principal and teachers, and made notes on conversations, observations and reflections after these encounters)
- Notes (some in vignette form) of morning assemblies, mass exercise sessions, and weekly school assemblies
- Documentary data such as the school yearbook (which includes historical background information on the school), and the Student Diary (which is a booklet cum notebook that students have to own and use, and which contains the school philosophy, school motto,

and code of conduct (i.e. school rules). Students write reminders for homework and tests in this diary).

- Photographs of both classrooms and their notice boards (taken at the same point in time). I also collected name lists, time-tables and made sketches of seating plans, and made notes of displays on school notice boards and walls

Apart from descriptions of the social context of the school, I collected literature that described the larger macro context in terms of the education system and Singapore society.

During the ten weeks, I initiated and maintained contact with teachers, students, and other personnel. This was not always easy and I had to sometimes push myself to assume a more extroverted persona so as to continue initiating contact. Such contact was extremely valuable as it enabled me to gather views and insights into everyday experiences of the school, and also allowed me to test out ideas on classroom microcultures in conversations as I refined my perceptions and understanding. Whenever possible, including during recess and after school, I made myself available for interaction so that I could get to know students and teachers in an informal context. During these interactions, as part of trust building, I explained and re-framed the project repeatedly so as to continuously reassure participants that they would not be taken advantaged of or harmed in any way. I emphasised at every possible opportunity that the studying was simply about how a group of individuals become a class.

I had not been officially assigned a space in the staff-room where I could put my equipment. Consequently, I tried, in all that I did, including where I sat or where I put recording equipment to be careful to not intrude on *anyone's* space – not just that of the two teachers I was attached to.

As an observer, I held without doubt, a privileged role, and felt that I should offer the participants of the study some kind of return for their time and effort. Agar (1980) refers to this as '*exchanging services of reciprocity*'. I did this by frequently offering to help the two teachers and their students: I sorted out photocopied materials for teachers; frequently collected student files and assignments; and on two occasions, filled in for teachers (in other classes) when one had to attend a meeting and the other was absent from school.

## 4.6. Changes to Research Design

It was noted earlier (see 4.3.1) how, by the end of the first meeting with the teachers, the duration of lesson observations had been shortened to three weeks because they were uncomfortable with my presence in class. The previous section illustrated how, during data collection, the original research design was modified in several significant ways to suit the specifics of the research context. In summary, they are as follow:

1. I had planned to study both teachers and students, but found that the realities of the research context provided little access to teachers. With hindsight, I had been idealistic to have expected more of their time. It was the beginning of the year and consequently, the teachers were extremely busy and unavailable for interviews. There was, during the duration of classroom observations, time only for the occasional chance encounter and quick conversation. Later, in February, I was able to talk with them in the canteen when we sometimes had lunch together. They were apprehensive about being interviewed when I broached the subject, but this did eventually take place in February. On the other hand, the research context allowed me greater access to students, leading consequently to a rich collection of student-centred data in the form of student diaries, compositions etc.
2. The study was originally designed with two primary means of data collection – classroom observation and interview. However, I found that students were available for interview on certain days, and once lesson observations had ended, I had limited and irregular access to them. Consequently, the interviews were unable to generate as much data as expected.
3. The initial research design had not included a student questionnaire – but one was created on-site.
4. By negotiating access to two classrooms, each of a different academic stream, the study would now look at the effect (if any) of streaming on the co-construction of classroom culture.

The following (Figure 4.1) is a diagrammatic summary of the sequence of events in data collection:

<b>December</b>	Negotiated entry into school and classes. Met Principal and two teachers
<b>January</b>	
Week 1	Began observing classroom and attending morning and weekly assemblies
Week 2	Began student-interviews
Week 3	
Week 4	Ended classroom observations
<b>February</b>	
	Continued with student-interviews until end of month
	Conducted teacher-interviews
	Administered student-questionnaires
	Interviewed Principal and Discipline Master
	Collected supplementary data
<b>March</b>	
	Interviewed HOD (English) and Teacher in-charge of Pastoral Care
	Photocopied student diary entries and compositions

**Figure 4.1: Summary of Research Sequence**

#### **4.7. Data Analysis**

This section moves the research process from data collection to data analysis. Sowden and Keeves (1988, 524-526) identify two important aspects of reporting research: the first involves reporting on the methods employed in the conduct of data analysis and the second involves the presentation of research findings. Both enable the reader to function as co-analyst. This section aims to provide the reader with a clear and concise account of the procedural steps taken in data analysis, the decision rules employed, and the methods of analysis involved in the examination of data with respect to the specific research issues. The reader is presented with a narration of the data analysis process, beginning with on-site



analysis involving initial impressions and interpretations during fieldwork before proceeding to more formal data analysis away from the fieldwork context.

#### **4.7.1. Scope of Data Analysis**

It is important to limit the goal of data analysis in this study: it is *not* to describe classroom culture fully or comprehensively. I am unsure of *how* and within what framework such a goal may be achieved. I suspect such a task would lie outside the capacity and scope of a Ph.D. thesis. Instead, I seek to make sense of certain interactions during lessons, by watching and analysing them closely and by contemplating them as coherently and systematically as I can. These interactions are those identified as significant to the microculture of the classroom, in that they appear to shape and be shaped by the microculture. The analysis I offer, whilst aiming to be grounded on a sound rationale and a systematic approach, is admittedly, coming from the approach of critical theory (see 3.5.2), greatly subjective. I aim, in the end, to defend the analysis I propose simply because I know no better way of making sense of the complexities of the data.

#### **4.7.2. Emergent Research Issues**

“All research is a search for patterns, for consistencies.”

Stake (1995:45)

When researchers work within the framework of specific research questions, the patterns being sought are likely to be known (or hinted at) in advance, and being so, they serve as a template for analysis. This study, however, began with no such template. That I am investigating how classroom interactions shape microcultures, meant that I entered the school and the two classrooms generally attentive to the ‘whole’, but it is an understanding of the ‘parts’, and how they relate to the whole that I aim to work towards. I began fieldwork open to what would surface as significant in the co-construction of classroom culture, and my initial focus was therefore wide. The open-ended approach of the study meant that I would follow leads provided by the data, and allow themes to emerge and guide data analysis. By the end of the first week of school, my attention was drawn to certain features of teacher and student behaviour in the lessons. I verified these initial impressionistic analyses by sampling early recordings, making notes on significant features of the lessons, and noting recurrent themes. Initial analysis revealed several recurrent features of the observed lessons:

- Class B students asked numerous and specific questions during lessons, particularly just after they had been instructed to do a task. This was interesting as TB's instructions were usually clearly presented. Students clarified their tasks, and this often occupied a large portion of the lesson. However, this did not seem unusual to either teacher or students.
- In contrast, Class D students did not ask as many questions, nor were their questions as specific. This was despite the fact that they often seemed unclear as to what TD wanted them to do. Her instructions were neither as specific, nor as clear as TB's. There appeared to be two main types of difficulties that caused problematic incidents during lessons. Often, this led to "*running repairs*", a term used by Wright (1992:115) to refer to how the lesson is given up (temporarily at least) to the solution of local problems in the instructional dialogue between teachers and learners. The two recurring types of problems leading to running repairs were those related to classroom management (or discipline problems), and those related to task execution.
- Both teachers seemed to differ in the ways they provided task instructions, in the ways they managed student questions, and in their attitudes towards class management and discipline. Their contrastive patterns of behaviour, particularly when juxtaposed was intriguing.

On-site analysis, initial impressions and interpretations brought the study its emergent research issues. These were:

- teacher instructions and student questions
- attitudes to class rules and discipline

I focussed on these interactions, interpreting as I sought to understand. I attempted to test initial impressionistic understandings by asking more precise questions during the scheduled interviews and at impromptu discussions with staff and Principal. Data collection was adjusted so that student interviews now generated information on emergent research issues. I elicited and recorded insider views on asking questions in class, attitudes to class rules and discipline, triangulating observations and interpretations with interviewees.

To widen my perspective and deepen my understanding, I attempted to generate more data from other sources. The student questionnaire was designed accordingly, so that more precise information could be collected that would enable me to see if patterns observed in the lessons triangulated with those generated from the questionnaire. Certain questions required students to describe classroom processes in terms of what they did or would do in class, and their answers were later matched with what they were seen to do. Thus, data collection, which began as a broad conceptualisation of theoretical issues germane to classroom culture, became increasingly focused.

I looked for patterns and correspondence as I observed, interviewed and reviewed documents. Fieldwork and data analysis were, for me, not distinct phases as such. This echoes the comment often made within interpretive research that, in some form or other, researchers aggregate, interpret and test patterns from the point at which they begin observations. I left the fieldwork context after ten weeks, having amassed a substantial amount of material.

## **From 'Material Collected' to 'Data for Analysis'**

### ***4.7.3. Stage One: Familiarising, focusing and sacrificing***

While I had been indulging in on-site analysis on a limited scale during data collection, once away from the fieldwork context, data analysis began afresh. Wanting to approach the data with a fresh eye, I started data analysis by acquainting myself with the corpus of material that had been amassed. This was the beginning of a search for patterns across the multiple data sources of field notes of general observations, audio-recordings of lessons, interviews, student questionnaires, photocopies of students' diary entries and English compositions, and supplementary documents.

I began with a document review, and read the school year book and student diary. These provided information on the social context. With their photographs, descriptions of school philosophy, detailed outline of school rules etc. they formed a backdrop against which the rest of the material could stand. I then listened to audio recordings of lessons and interviews before reading through the stacks of photocopied student compositions and diary entries. Finally, I went through the student questionnaires.

It was immediately clear that in my worry of having too little data. Culture is, after all, widely encompassing, so my *modus operandi* had been to collect as much data as I could possibly get. I had overcompensated by collecting too much. I needed to cut down on the material that would eventually be used to generate data for analysis. This meant sacrificing and focusing (Sunderland, 1996). I also had to decide how the data from different sources would be utilised.

This first contact with the multiple data sources revealed audio recordings and notes made during lesson observations as the most interesting and illuminative of emergent research issues. There appeared to be striking differences in classroom interaction patterns between the two classes. The interaction patterns in each class seemed consistent within its microculture, and these patterns appeared to affect - and be affected by - its microculture. Audio-recordings of lessons were particularly appealing as a data source because, when converted into transcripts, they become verifiable data, ready for more thorough analysis. I decided therefore to use lesson recordings and notes to generate primary data, interviews and student questionnaires to generate supporting or secondary data, and all other sources to supply peripheral data.

#### ***4.7.4. Stage Two: Generating initial insights***

I began the task of converting audio recordings of lessons into analysable items of data by reading the notes that I had made during observations. Because these notes sought to capture what the recorder could not, they helped to clarify what was happening during lessons. I listened to the tape recordings, and as I did, I supplemented notes with more information on the content of the lesson. After each lesson, a one-page summary was produced, covering two sections: the first outlined the general linguistic focus and the main learning activities of the lesson, and the second listed interesting and/or recurring interactional episodes, recurring themes, as well as tentative interpretations of data. An interaction, event, or instance of behaviour struck me as interesting if I had not expected it to occur, or if I had not expected it to occur so frequently or rarely, and was therefore curious as to why it was so. Which features I found interesting was therefore as much a statement of the features themselves as it was a reflection of personal classroom experiences as teacher and learner (critical theory, see 3.5.2). Due to the breadth of the topic of classroom culture, and because early analysis was on a wide front, it was felt that limiting these summaries to one page would allow only what was outstanding and immediately relevant to emerge.

This was done with each class separately, such that all twelve recorded lessons of Class B were heard in the order in which they occurred. The same was done with the recordings of Class D's sixteen lessons. This procedure provided me with a sense of continuity between the events of one lesson and the next, and a sense of historical progression or development of the culture of each class. Through such immersion, I was able to acquire a better feel of the microculture emerging in each class.

The process of reconstructing lessons continued with a second listening of the recordings. My attention was now drawn to a range of discourse features, which I identified with categories such as:

- I = teacher providing instruction
- TQ = teacher asking question
- SQ = student asking question
- P = teacher praising student(s)
- E = teacher encouraging student(s)
- CR = teacher explicitly describing class rule
- TD = teacher disciplining student(s)
- SD = students managing classroom discipline
- TP = teacher punishing student(s)

I noted when these features occurred in a lesson, alongside on-site observation notes, and made broad transcriptions of specific instances of teacher-student interaction that were interesting. I also located when in the lesson these instances occurred, noting the counter numbers on the tape recorder for easy future access.

At this point, several recurring patterns of behaviour and discourse were clearly identifiable. I attempted a closer analysis of these patterns by circling analogous instances of behaviour. When some of these instances of behaviour occurred more frequently in one class, I sought to understand why it was so, and what effect it would have on the evolving microculture. I considered these frequent and rare events from a variety of attentional foci and analytic perspectives. Reviewing the lesson recordings, my attention was once again drawn, as it had been during fieldwork, to the ways in which students of both classes asked, or did not ask questions. Their questioning behaviour was strikingly different, and seemed to affect, and be

affected by classroom culture. How students question appeared to contribute towards the construction of the microculture, *and* appeared to be an outcome of the microculture. There were other discursive practices in teacher-student interaction (such as instances of rule violation by students followed by disciplinary action) that were interesting. Like student questioning behaviour, they were parts that seemed to relate in some way to the larger whole, the microculture of the classroom.

I was finally positioned to select instances of teacher-student interactions to transcribe as data extracts to be used to compose pictures that depicted the microculture of each class. The process of transcribing audio recordings of the observed lessons was both tedious and time consuming. But the process proved rewarding. I found that even while working in extremely noisy conditions, with very vocal children (making transcription especially difficult), *"no more than partial transcriptions even in those circumstances could reveal classroom and interaction patterns that observation checklists, interviews and training programmes could not"* (van Lier 1988:64).

It was clear that, using the data that classroom observations alone would generate, data analysis could proceed in a myriad number of ways. It was clear too that no analytic structure could possibly encompass every item of data and every piece of analysis so as to result in a report with overall coherence. In order to keep a sense of perspective, and to make the task of data analysis manageable, I decided that I would take, as basic units of analysis, instances of classroom behaviour that take place between teacher and students, and instances of comments on the significance of this behaviour on broader aspects of meaning in the microculture.

#### **4.7.5. Arriving at a System for Data Analysis**

Miles and Huberman (1994:303) hold that *"each researcher must craft a report structure that fits the intellectual and local context of the particular study."* This is understandable, and particularly attractive because of the creative freedom it grants the researcher. Nevertheless, the actual process of devising a system for analysis and carving out a report structure was a most difficult and challenging one, involving experimentation, rewriting, and a strong element of unpredictability. More than in any other phase of interpretive research, an iterative (see 1.1) linkage evolved between emerging research issues, identifying instances of behaviour for closer analyses, interim analyses which opened up more leads, and



which was followed by analyses of other classroom behaviour. The narration of the research process aims to reflect this iterative procedure in the conduct of data analysis.

Looking carefully at the kinds of questions students asked, and when these questions were asked, I wondered if student questioning behaviour was related to what the teacher had just said, or had not said. Consequently, my attention was drawn to the discourse of the teachers just before student questions occurred. These teacher-student interactions (or student-questioning episodes) within which student questions were located were themselves embedded in the wider culture of the classroom. I considered how these episodes could relate to other features of teacher-student interactions, or to other student behaviours.

It was through this series of connections – beginning with the extreme narrow focus of instances of student questioning behaviour; using these instances to look at teacher-student interactions; and then looking at how these interactions corresponded with other behaviours and interactions in the wider microculture – that the study acquired its method of data analysis. An analogy that comes to mind is that of the gradually widening angle of a photographer’s viewfinder to reveal (through the lens) more and more of the subject and its surroundings. This describes the gradual widening of research issues or foci. As data analysis moves outwards, I work towards arriving at a more holistic description of the culture of the classroom.

**4.7.6. Anonymising People and Place**

In line with general social research, the study is described in this report in a manner that protects the identity of its subjects. Throughout the thesis and appendices, all reference to people and place have been made anonymous. Names of the school, Principal, teachers and students have been excluded, and instead each is referred to by a system of abbreviations. In order to present data clearly, the following method for anonymisation has been adopted:

School-X	The school
Mr-P	Principal of the school
Mr-HOD	Head of English Department
DM	Discipline Master
TB	English language teacher of Class B
TD	English language teacher of Class D



T-Maths	Teacher who teaches both classes Mathematics
SC2	Student who occupies desk that is in the third column (i.e. column C. Column A is the line of desks closest to the doors, column E is the line closest to the windows) and in the second row from the front of the classroom.

The above system of referring to students does not differentiate between students of class B and class D. Instead, a student is identified simply by the position of his or her desk. There were two main ways of identifying students: either by the position of the student in the class register (where student names are listed alphabetically) or in terms of where students sit in the classroom. Students in Singapore classrooms generally occupy the same desk everyday. I decided to adopt this latter method of anonymisation as it allows the reader to have a sense of where students are located (in relation to the teacher and their classmates) as they participate in class discussion.

Both the presentation and discussion of data refer explicitly to the school diary and the school annual yearbook. These have been included as data but have not been included as academic references in the thesis's reference section in line with the confidentiality requirement.

#### **4.8. Summary**

The chapter began with a detailed outline of the research design, and then showed how this design was modified to the specifics of the fieldwork context. The detailed descriptions of data collection and analysis reported blind alleys and problems encountered along the way, and provided the reader with explanations of what was done, how and why it was done. As an interpretive study, the research design was emergent rather than preordained because

“meaning is determined by context to such a great extent; because the existence of multiple realities constrains the development of a design based on only one (the investigator's) construction; because what will be learned at a site is always dependent on the interaction between investigator and context, and the interaction is also not fully predictable; and because the nature of mutual shadings cannot be known until they are witnessed.”

Lincoln and Guba (1985:208)

Chapter Five describes the context of the study, beginning with the macro social contexts of Singapore society and its education system, before describing the context of the school.



## **Chapter 5. The Macro Contexts: Singapore and the school**

### **5.1. Introduction**

“Much of what goes on within the classroom is influenced by factors within the wider educational institution, the wider educational environment and the wider society.”

Holliday 1994:11

Understanding the larger social context is essential to understanding the interrelationship between classroom culture and the outside world. The first step then is to develop thorough and comprehensive descriptions of the Singapore situation. A well-described context creates a balance between the uniqueness and ordinariness of the place. It is also vital in providing the sense of ‘being there’ needed by the reader to vicariously experience the context as the researcher did. Such a description encompasses both micro and macro elements.

This chapter describes the macro social contexts of the study which concern influences from outside the classroom that are key in understanding what happens between teachers and students within the micro context of the classroom. The chapter begins with wide-angled descriptions of Singapore society, then proceeds to describing the education system before narrowing the lens to focus on the context of the school. Macro descriptions stop at the classroom door for what happens in the classroom will be described in Chapters Six and Seven as the micro social context. Diagrammatically, the chapter moves as follows:

**Singapore Today: Linguistic and Socio-Economic Background**

Education for Cohesion & Education for Economic Success

**Singapore Education System**

Culture of Education and Characteristics of the Singapore student

Critique of the Education System

**Profile of the School**

**Figure 5-1: Scope of Macro Context and Outline of Chapter**

## 5.2. Singapore Today

Located on the southern tip of peninsula Malaysia, Singapore is made up of its main island and some 60 islets within its territorial waters, comprising a total land area of 650 square kilometres (226 square miles). Its people, of just below three million, are a young multiethnic and multilingual migrant community. This population is composed of 77% Chinese; 14% Malay; 7% Indian; and 2% 'others' which includes Eurasians, Europeans, and Arabs.

In the last four decades, Singapore has transformed itself from a struggling post-colonial society plagued with problems of survival, to a politically and economically stable country. It is presently rated as the fourth best place in the world in which to do business, next to Switzerland, Japan, and Germany (Yip, 1997). Indeed, some commentators describe Singapore as

"the mythical phoenix, having transformed itself in less than two centuries from a small fishing village in a jungle swampland into a dynamic city state, an economic powerhouse that is one of the busiest ports in the world and has the highest standard of living in Southeast Asia"

Micucci (December 1994).

This is a success story to which few countries in the contemporary world can lay claim. In presenting a brief historical account of the transformation of Singapore below, I adopt a 'problems and solutions' organisational framework, which considers how a society and its problems relate to a government and its solutions.

## 5.3. The Linguistic Situation in Singapore

A discussion of English in the Singapore context is problematic due to the country's complex linguistic legacy and its rapidly changing linguistic directions. The complexity of multilingualism in Singapore stems from the fact that the Chinese, Indian and Malay segments are each an amalgam of linguistically differentiated sub-groups. Each of these ethnic groups speaks a variety of languages and/or dialects, which reflect their geographical origins in India, China and Malaysia. An ethnic Chinese may speak one or more of the following Min languages: Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, and Hakka. Mandarin - today

perceived as the main carrier of the Chinese culture<sup>6</sup> - was propagated only at the turn of the century following the call for national unity in China. The ethnic Indians speak a variety of languages, each with its own script form and culture. Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, (all Dravidian in origin) and Punjabi, Hindi, Sindhi, Bengali, Gujarati (Indo-Aryan languages) come from linguistic traditions many centuries old (Pakir 1997:57). Similarly, internal linguistic divisions mark the Malays, although their strong presence in the region and Islamic faith probably confer a stronger sense of solidarity among them than either the Chinese or the Indians. They include groups of Indonesian origin, such as the Minangkabau, Batak, Javanese, Bugis, Boyanese, the Peninsular Malays and the peoples of Borneo origin, each with their own language forms that set them apart from the rest (Tan 1998:63).

Singapore has one national language (Malay – because of its indigenous status) and four official languages. This official multilingual model neatly fits the nation's population into four major ethnic blocs, with Mandarin, Malay, Tamil and English as the respective official linguistic representation of each ethnic group. The model consolidates the respective ethnic blocs by bringing together diverse ethnic sub-communities on the basis of a common ethnic origin, language and culture. Officially, this multilingual model is seen to grant linguistic as well as cultural recognition to the multi-ethnic population by granting their so-called corresponding associated languages equal official status and legitimacy (Tan 1998).

Apart from uniting the Eurasians, English is the lingua franca and the official working language. As the language of government, administration, trade and industry, and education, English is the means towards educational and technological advancement. It is perceived as the language of economic growth, social mobility, economic gain, professional and career opportunities (Saravanan 1997: Personal Communication).

In schools, English is the sole medium of instruction, with the 'mother tongues' (as they are officially referred to) Mandarin, Tamil, and Malay taught as compulsory second language subjects until university or tertiary education. A pupil beginning school is assigned a second language (his/her 'mother tongue') according to his/her official linguistic origin. This may mean that a pupil assigned a 'mother tongue' may not have previously acquired the said language as a mother tongue because it is not spoken at home. In effect therefore, the multilingual model predetermines that the Chinese learn Mandarin, the Malays, Malay, and

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<sup>6</sup> This is a consequence of the government's successful "Speak Mandarin Campaign", launched in 1979 with slogans such as "If you are Chinese, make a statement in Mandarin".

the Indians, Tamil. From the early 1990s this has altered slightly in response to representations made by some Indian minority groups: today Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu have been granted official mother tongue status.

Singapore's linguistic policy of English-knowing bilingualism means that in school, English is the compulsory 'first language', and that each of the three ethnic languages – Mandarin, Malay and Tamil – is assigned the role of 'mother tongue' second language status. This multilingual model stems from a linguistically engineered division of labour between the mother tongue languages on one hand and English on the other. Policy statements invest mother tongues with moralistic and ethno-cultural dimensions, and claim that without them, society would face "*deculturalisation*". Government discourse claims that English brings "*western decadent values*" that are locked in contention with "*Asian cultural virtues*" as represented by the official ethnic languages (see Tan 1998:57-61). The decision to teach mother tongues in schools is premised on the assumption that language is the primary carrier of values. In this vein, mother tongues have been officially promoted, on the basis of the Whorfian rationale (Whorf 1956:214), to help determine a more Asian world-view. It is a move that supposedly serves as a check against the domination of the economic orientation in the Singaporean character.

The 1990s have seen government discourse undergo a shift in focus to highlight the socio-economic value of ethnic languages, linking ethno-cultural values with economic performance:

"... if the economy is shaky, Singapore cannot survive... we should make the effort to keep the Chinese language alive as part of Singapore society. We should retain the virtuous elements in Chinese culture. The elements that impede modernisation and economic growth we should discard."

Goh Chok Tong, The Straits Times 27<sup>th</sup> July 1991

## 5.4. English in Singapore

During early post-independence, in the mid 1960s, within the conditions of a then underdeveloped internal economy with widespread unemployment, illiteracy, and suspicions from the non-English educated majority, it was expedient for the English-educated political elite to ideologise English as a neutral utilitarian language. It was deemed a precious gift



from the British for a linguistically heterogeneous country, to be put to good use. Today, the language possesses a living community of speakers, and is the dominant working language of the country, used as something between a first language and a second language by its multilingual speakers, and is *"a powerful enough force to be capable of seriously separating the English-educated from the non-English educated in the country"* (see Pakir 1998:65).

Language policy decisions have, over the decades, been institutional, interventionist, and goal-oriented. Language planning efforts have been described as language management of human resources, and as proactive intervention to support non-linguistic goals (Kuo & Jernudd, 1994; Gopinathan 1994). The government has defined and limited which languages it will acknowledge as languages: not all have been maintained and supported, and some have been actively discouraged.

In aiming to improve access to human resource management, language management has determined language roles in the domains of work, school, industry, home and social interaction. The management of multilingualism, in which schools have played a large and significant part, has been deemed relatively successful and the various ethnic groups have acquiesced in this large-scale linguistic engineering (Gopinathan, 1997; Yip, 1997). Census reports of 1979, 1980, 1990 trace language shifts of the various communities to English, especially as the dominant home language. 20.3% of the entire population reported using English as the dominant household language, a figure that trails behind Mandarin (26.0%) and other Chinese languages (36.7%) (Census of Population Office 1991:17). The literacy rate in English stood at 65%, and in real terms, this means that 35% of the population did not read and speak English. The Report also revealed that proficient users of English are those in the higher socio-economic and educational bracket. Apart from this, English (encompassing a cline of varieties from Standard Singapore English to Singlish<sup>7</sup>) has, to a large extent, replaced Bazaar Malay<sup>8</sup> that was used in the 40s, 50s and 60s for inter-ethnic communication.

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<sup>7</sup> Singapore differentiates between the two: SSE (Standard Singapore English) is the variety that has more prestige: it is used in formal occasions, taught in school, used in the media, and serves as the model for those who wish to master the language. Singlish is colloquial Singapore English, and has more users, particularly across the lower strata of society. In the last decade, it has begun filtering into the media and performing arts, and many Singaporeans argue that it is an important part of the Singaporean identity.

<sup>8</sup> This is simplified colloquial Malay that was far more predominant as the lingua franca during pre-independent Singapore.

The next section presents a brief historical background of education in Singapore. It aims to provide the reader with an understanding and appreciation of the attitudes and beliefs of Singaporeans towards education in general and English in particular.

## **5.5. History of Education in Singapore**

As a British crown colony, Singapore offered some schooling (six to seven years) to its indigenous Malay population, and there were some English medium schools for turning out junior level clerks. Indian groups and Chinese local clans and organisations were left to establish their own schools. These separate educational systems, and the limited availability of English medium education led to vertical cleavages, which split the population on the basis of language. Families spoke different languages, and within the same language, they spoke different dialects. Such linguistic variation strengthened ethnic identities, emphasising close links with original homelands. At the time of full internal self-government in the late 50s, there existed in Singapore four systems of education, each with different end points, different standards, and different certificates (Pakir, 1997:68). This was the educational scenario that the new government of Singapore inherited.

This presented the government with two immediate problems: that of creating a unified people from a multiethnic society with strong links to parent societies of China, India and Malaysia; and that of creating a successful economy. To address the problem of a multiethnic divisive population, the government instituted a set of policies, largely around the central tenet of '*unity through multiculturalism*'. This involved the sensitive handling of ethnicity in terms of language and culture while creating national identity. To address the second issue, the government made an absolute commitment to a developmental thrust that would, over the following decades, propel the economy forward towards the goal of an economically prosperous government state. To achieve both these aims, the government looked to education.

## **5.6. Faith in Education as the Solution**

Educational reforms reflect a society's unresolved conflicts and problems, as well as foreshadow its hopes, concerns and visions for the future. In the politically turbulent days of pre-independent Singapore, education was already perceived by emerging leaders as a vital

social institution. With the first steps to internal government, it was called upon to address core national issues of political and social identity, equality of treatment, meritocracy, and economic transformation. Faith in the potential power of education was coupled with strong political will, meticulous planning and resource support so that educational goals could be attained.

This pragmatic approach to the nation's problems has served to provide both the impetus and the conditions necessary for the implementation of educational reforms over the last four decades. The capacity of the education system to absorb and consolidate so many changes within so short a historical timeframe has been propelled by political rhetoric stressing the logic of survival in a resource-scarce republic and a determination to ensure that Singapore has a place in the community of nations.

The absolute faith in the viability of education as a tool for social and economic engineering is as prevalent today as it was then. Political leaders perceive education as a means towards an end - a powerful tool to be used to sculpt society. Political belief has been translated into popular faith: the people of Singapore trust in education to bring upward mobility. The school is therefore perceived as the crucible of social and economic change, through which the country is provided with unity, skills and knowledge.

The discussion now briefly considers how the leaders of Singapore have used, and continue to use education to try and foster cohesion amongst a disparate group of people, and to fashion a vibrant Singapore economy. The discussion is presented in full in Appendix B:321.

## **The Twin Challenges of Education:**

### ***5.6.1. Education for National Cohesion***

“If we are not to perish in chaos caused by antagonisms and prejudices between watertight cultural and linguistic compartments, then we have to educate the right responses amongst our young in school.”

Lee Kuan Yew (speech reported in the Straits Times 9<sup>th</sup> December 1959)

The 60s was a period of intensive education centralisation as the government sought to build a cohesive society (see Appendix B:321). It sought to engender desirable cognitive and

attitudinal dispositions, through determining what schools should teach. On a more explicit level, there was, and still is, the daily national flag raising and lowering ceremony (where attendance is compulsory for all pupils and staff) accompanied with the singing of the National Anthem, and the recitation of the pledge affirming commitment to the nation's ideals of equality and multiculturalism.

Central to the education system is the fundamental political commitment to equal treatment of all groups, languages and cultures. With multiculturalism as the chosen ideology, there is an educational commitment firstly to preserving and enhancing the various ethnic cultures and traditions, and secondly to striving for a supra ethnic Singaporean identity. The former is to be achieved principally through the bilingual policy of mother tongue teaching (Appendix B:321), and the latter through English Language. For the majority of Singapore's students (bearing in mind their ethnic and linguistic profile), the school is the crucible of linguistic change, where the new languages of English and Mandarin are learnt.

### **5.6.2. Education for Economic Success**

Over the last four decades, education, through a constant fine-tuning, has played a pivotal role in fashioning a vibrant Singapore economy. With independence, there was early recognition that Singapore needed to transform its economy, to create wealth for necessary infrastructure development, and to meet the needs of a burgeoning population.

"Singapore's national wealth lies in our human resources, and our human potentials must therefore be developed to the fullest possible extent. An educated and enlightened population is our guarantee for a prosperous future." Ong Pang Boon (1966)

Today the government still refers to its population as its only natural resource, and education continues more than ever, to be closely tied to the economy. The publication of a crucial report by the Economic Committee in 1986 entitled "*The Singapore Economy: New Directions*" suggested key requirements for vigorous economic growth that would give the Singapore economy a competitive edge that is "*as developed as the West, and yet more competitive*". The report emphasised the fundamental role of education, and consequently, the minister of Education announced that future education policies would be guided by three principles: policies would be geared towards keeping pace with the economy; education would emphasise basics; and schools would seek to promote creativity (Yip 1997:25). There

had always been an attempt to synchronise socio-economic policies with educational policies, but in 1986, this became a stipulated guiding principle for education (see Appendix B: 321). A tight coupling between education and economy means economic activity impacts upon schooling (Gopinathan 1997:44).

The discussion now considers how education defines and shapes the Singaporean identity.

## 5.7. Education and Society

“How our young are brought up in the home and moulded in the school will determine Singapore’s future. After parents, teachers are the most influential persons in the lives of the young. You leave your unique impression on your students, and cumulatively, you shape the students’ sense of what society values, and what society expects of them.”

Goh Chok Tong, 1996

Implicit in this quote from this speech entitled “*Prepare our children for the new century: teach them well*” delivered by the Prime Minister at the annual Teachers’ Day Rally is firstly, the faith that Singaporeans have in education, and secondly, the vital role of the teacher in the education system. These values are in line with Confucianism (see 1.3.2). In present day discourse, Singapore is described as a Confucianist society (Gopinathan 1997:Personnal communication). Such a society has, by definition, prescribed roles for education and teaching in general, and for teachers and students in particular. These roles shape the microculture of the classroom in distinct ways, promoting certain kinds of interaction and discouraging others. The quote above illustrates how the national culture filters, through the teacher acting as agent, into the classroom culture so that the microculture echoes or mirrors larger society.

### Confucianism as an Organising Ideology

With independence, Singapore embraced trade and industry, welcomed foreign investment, multinationals, and English. With these arrived extraneous influences which prompted a perceived need for an antidote to these negative influences. Schools began offering moral education as a cultural ballast against outside influences “*which have perverted the character of our people*” so that Singapore society would remain cohesive under stress (Ong Teng Cheong, 1979 Straits Times, 17 Sept 1979).

Various moral education syllabi have since been devised to explicitly teach values deemed desirable. One of these is the much promoted '*Confucian Ethics*' which, for the first time, explicitly formulated Confucianism as a fundamental value system for Singaporeans. At the societal level, this has led to a search for a national ideology, and the articulation of a set of core values that together stress filial piety, commitment to consensus, respect for duty and obligations, and a need for order, among other values. The appeal of Confucianism to the government of a Chinese majority state that upholds social discipline is obvious. Imported from China, and tailored to the needs of Singapore, it provides an organisational framework that is used to structure society, and hold its people together.

What therefore began as a vaguely defined call to hold on to Asian values has now taken on definite shape in Singapore discourse. Today it has a new significance as Western commentators attribute economic growth in the '*four dragons*' to Confucianist values of solidarity, thrift and effort, sometimes collectively referred to as '*communitarianism*' and '*soft authoritarianism*'. Communal interests (defined by numerous and specific rules and regulations) are placed ahead of those of the individual as the group strives for social stability and economic growth. Singapore's United Nations representative explains why:

"We are a small canoe. If we tell everyone, 'Go ahead, behave as if you are on an aircraft carrier, jump up and down, do whatever you want,' we would have trouble. At some point the canoe would capsize. The rules that apply when you are 3m people squeezed together on a small island must be tighter."

Kishore Mahbubani, Weekend FT (8<sup>th</sup> August 1999)

The chapter has thus far illustrated how the perceived needs of society shape education. Pupils are educated to meet society's socio-economic needs. The structure of the school system has implications for socialisation. The expectations the school has of its pupils, and what pupils themselves experience as they go through the education process is the fabric of the peculiarities of the Singapore experience. That pupils in Singapore have to learn two languages in school; that the school emphasises Science and Mathematics; and that everyday every pupil salutes the national flag and recites the pledge are not dependent on the needs of the pupil, but on the perceived needs of the state at a given time.

The next section narrows the macro social context as it describes the Singapore education system.



## **5.8. The Singapore Education System**

Introduced in 1979 as a set of major reforms, the '*New Education System*' provides at least ten years of general education for all children. It focuses on the teaching of languages, Mathematics and Science.

Schools in Singapore comprise primary schools, secondary schools, and junior colleges. There are four types of schools:

1. Government schools (fully funded by government)
2. Government-aided schools (heavily subsidised by government and managed by committees made up of private individuals)
3. Independent schools (run by their respective Boards of Governors that decide on staffing, curricular and in-school policy matters)
4. Autonomous schools (government and government-aided schools that are given more autonomy and additional resources, and that function more like independent schools)

A more detailed description of the education system is presented in Appendix C:325. The description that follows focuses on parts of the system relevant to the study.

### **5.8.1. Primary Education**

#### **Foundation Stage (Primary 1- 4)**

- Common curriculum for a firm foundation in English, Mother Tongue and Mathematics
- Other subjects include Moral Education, Music, Art, Health Education, Social Studies and Physical Education

#### **Orientation Stage (Primary 5 – 6)**

- Pupils formally streamed, according to learning ability, at the end of primary four
- All pupils advance to one of three language streams EM1, EM2 and EM3, differentiated mainly by L1 and L2 proficiency (see Appendix C:325)
- At the end of primary six, pupils sit for The Primary School Leaving Exam (PSLE)



## **The Primary School Leaving Exam (PSLE)**

This exam assesses pupils' suitability for secondary education, placing them, according to their learning ability, in the Special, Express or Normal stream in secondary schools.

### **5.8.2. Secondary Education**

#### **Special and Express Streams (Secondary 1- 4)**

- The Special and Express courses prepare pupils for the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education 'Ordinary' (GCE 'O') Level Examination in four years.
- The curriculum for the Special, and Express (and Normal Academic) streams includes English and English Literature, the Mother Tongue, Mathematics, General Science, History, Geography, Art and Crafts, Design and Technology and Home Economics, Moral Education and Music. On obtaining good results at the GCE "O" level examination, pupils can proceed to junior colleges, polytechnics or technical institutes.

#### **Normal Academic Stream**

- Pupils in the Normal Course take the General Certificate in Education 'Normal' (GCE 'N') Level Examination in their fourth year. Those who do well will qualify to go to a fifth year of study, which prepares them for the GCE 'O' Level Examination (above). Many of those who complete the course in the fourth year are likely to take up technical and vocational education at the technical institutes.

#### **Normal Technical Stream**

- Pupils in the Normal Technical stream are offered, apart from the core subjects of English, basic Mother Tongue, Mathematics and Computer Applications, electives such as Technical Studies, Science, Home Economics, Art and Crafts, and Elements of Office Administration.
- The curriculum is geared towards strengthening pupils' proficiency in English and Mathematics.
- Pupils in the Normal (Technical) course are prepared for technical-vocational education with the Institute of Technical Education. They sit for the "N" level examination at the end of the fourth year.

### **5.8.3. Post-Secondary Education**

- On completing secondary education, pupils can, if they qualify, proceed to either a two or a three-year pre-university programme. Admission is based on a points system computed from the pupils' GCE "O" level aggregate. At the end of this course, pupils sit the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of education "Advanced" (GCE "A") level examination, the results of which determine their eligibility for tertiary education at either a polytechnic or a university.
- Alternatively, students completing secondary education can, if they qualify, choose to proceed with technical and commercial studies at a polytechnic. Upon graduation, they can pursue degree courses at one of the two local universities.

## **5.9. The Culture of Education and Characteristics of The Singapore Student**

Elements of the education system such as ability-based streaming, frequent assessment, systematic and customised teacher and school leadership training create and sustain a culture of effort dedicated to high academic achievement among pupils. This culture of effort pushes students to perform at high levels locally and internationally. In an international project (Elley 1994, reported in Gopinathan et. al., 1998:14) on the reading literacy of 9-year-olds and 14-year-olds conducted in 1991, covering 32 education systems in the world, Singapore, students performed better in English reading literacy than did, for example, students in Ireland and Canada. In 1996, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement released the results of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study. Seven and Eight graders (13 and 14 year olds) in 41 countries were surveyed; Singapore ranked first in both Mathematics and Science, and by comfortable margins, such that even students from Singapore's weaker academic streams did better than the world average.

Given its unpromising beginnings, Singapore has much to be proud of. However, frequent assessments, regular streaming and a single-minded march towards excellence also contribute to the education system being characterised by an ethic of competition between individuals and schools. The system encourages pupils to compete and excel, while its moral education programmes teach them to focus less on the individual and more on the needs of

the group. These opposing forces are captured in the two quotes below, the first on outperforming others in education and economy, and the second on shaping good citizens:

“Whether we succeed, survive and prosper as a nation after the pre-independence generation is dead and gone, will depend on the next generations – their commitment to country and community; their willingness to strive and excel, to stand and fight, their ability to think, to compete and to outperform others in whatever they do.”

Goh Chok Tong, 1996

“The litmus test of a good education is whether it nurtures citizens who can live, work, contend and co-operate in a civilised way. Is he loyal and patriotic? Is he, when the need arises, a good soldier ready to defend his country? ...Is he filial, respectful to elders, law-abiding and responsible?”

Lee Kuan Yew, 1979, in Yip 1997:16

This accent on excellence manifests itself in the structure of larger society and that of the education system. In 1992, the Ministry of Education introduced a ranking exercise of secondary schools by publishing the ‘O’ level results of all schools in the main English newspaper. This was the first time in the history of Singapore education that policy makers publicly released school examination results. The underlying rationale is to not just keep parents and pupils informed about how different schools perform, but to also deliberately encourage schools to compete for pupils and resources by applying a free market-place principle of competition. Such a move sharpens competition among schools so as to benefit from the discipline of market forces. However, it also has the immediate effect of heightening the importance of achievement scores of schools at the expense of other curricular activities, and a more long-term effect of weakening the system’s commitment and contribution to societal cohesion and collaboration: competition benefits the strong rather than the weak and promotes greater inequality.

In her ethnographic study on the implementation of moral education, Joy Chew (1997:90) concludes that the moral education programme

“conveys its own morality and set of values, and this is often in tension with the socio-centric focus of official moral education.... [and that] pupils are confronted with a social morality of co-operation and mutual supportiveness, and with an economic morality that encourages individualism, competition, inequality and self-interest”.

Intense academic competition is an established fact in the entire school system and beyond: this drive to excel *"is the strongest driving force in Singapore society, a force that encourages unbridled competition and selfish individualism, and one that is reflected in the education system"* (Chew 1997:91). It serves as a motivating force for teachers to aim for better performance at examinations. This is more achievable with better students, and teachers therefore prefer teaching better classes.

Apart from learning to compete, the average student is apparently also docile and law-abiding. Pang and Lim (1997) found that the teachers' unquestionable authority in the classroom, the evaluation of 'conduct' in term reports (where good conduct is usually taken to mean being well-behaved and observing rules) helps pupils to learn docility, obedience to authority and acceptance of hierarchy.

"Disciplined work habits, achievement orientation, and responsiveness to incentives are required to get good marks and qualifications" (Pang & Lim, 1997:367)

The closer the match between what the pupil practices in classrooms and what the state wants, the more stable the society. That Singaporeans are docile squares with Chan's (1976) observation of a political culture that discourages conflict, confrontation and bargaining. Such a culture encourages political stability, which along with a docile labour force, have contributed to the growth of foreign investments and economic success.

## **5.10. Critique of Education in Singapore**

Over the past four decades, Singapore's single-minded push for economic growth has paid off. Parallel to this has been the evolution of the school system from one that was divided, politicised, under-resourced, unequal, and with little link to economic needs, to one which has expanded access, closer links to industrial needs, and excellence in education. Continuous educational refinement over the years have been principally to fine-tune the system to respond better to perceived emerging economic needs as Singapore tackled economic restructuring. Fundamental structural innovations like streaming are argued to break up a lock-step curriculum and introduce greater curriculum variety and student options. Today there is a larger variety of schools and subjects at school. Planned curriculum innovations such as programmes like the Reading and English Acquisition Programme

(REAP) and Active Communicative Teaching (ACT) Programme have improved competencies significantly, and curriculum innovation implementation at school level has become increasingly school-led with greater levels of teacher involvement. As far as the eye can see, the educational system successfully promotes high academic achievement.

Since the mid-1980s however, with the emergence of an increasingly educated middle class, the old social contract in which the government *"imposed firm labour and social discipline in return for material rewards, jobs, good schooling, subsidised housing and effective transportation has been weakening"* (Gopinathan 1997: 49). Tensions have started to manifest themselves in the publicly voiced differences relating to inequality of opportunity and inequality of performance.

#### **5.10.1. Issues regarding Inequality of Opportunity**

An educational pattern that has been evident over the years is the increasing differentiation within the structure of the system. As mentioned above (see 5.5) early education initiatives were directed towards unifying the system. This achieved, there were follow-up to efforts to improve bilingual attainment. Such efforts have, over the years, developed into preserving the unique, cultural identity of leading Chinese schools. To this end, the government introduced the concept of the Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools, which are all-Chinese schools, attended exclusively by high-performing Chinese pupils, who offer both English and Chinese at first-language level. In its effort to provide more school level administrative autonomy, the government has, over the years, allowed eight leading English medium schools to go 'independent', and several other high-performing government schools to become autonomous (see 5.8).

While both 'independent' and SAP schools cater to the academic elite, it is the latter and the 'Speak Mandarin' campaign that have borne criticism, especially from minority group leaders. By definition, SAP school pupils represent the cream of the primary cohort - pupils who can be reasonably expected to become part of the future elite. These schools, preserve the traditional features of Chinese medium schools, but promote ethnic segregation. That pupils should be schooled in an exclusively single ethnic environment seems, to many commentators, untenable in a society committed to multiculturalism, and counter to efforts towards generating a leadership that is both multiethnic, knowledgeable and committed to multiculturalism (Association of Muslim Professionals, 1990; Quah 1990; Gopinathan

1997:50). By giving so much (or the best that education has to offer) to a select few, society is polarised into the better and the less endowed. The issue of elitism is all the more pertinent in a country which has, as its only resource, its people.

Thus, more recent efforts, through meticulous experimentation and fine-tuning of the education system, have worked towards increasing differentiation. While newly post-independent Singapore worked actively towards 'de-ethnicisation', today's educational policies appear to gravitate towards 're-ethnicisation' (Gomez 1997).

### **5.10.2.      *Issues regarding Inequality of Performance***

A key assumption of Singapore's education system is that, in a multiethnic milieu with a history of ethnic differences, it promotes (via meritocracy) equality of opportunity, and contributes to social cohesion. However, recent research by Quah et. al. shows that inequalities persist for different socio-economic categories and ethnic groups. The provision of independent schools and SAP schools have been described as reinforcing social and educational inequalities. The vertical cleavages of race, language, religion and culture have not been eroded over four decades of effort to integrate the population, and the operation of a meritocratic system has not erased the power of home and ethnicity variables in determining educational performance (Quah et.al. 1997).

In Singapore politics today, there is an open acknowledgement of educational underachievement amongst the minorities, and a new willingness to reveal and discuss this issue. This marks a move away from the attractive but untenable perception of the myth of the universal child – where students are treated as though they are the same, and their differences are denied. In the first few decades of independence, the fundamental question of '*education for whom, for what purpose, and by what means*' was not examined at close quarters against the backdrop of Singapore's particular socio-economic and political milieu (Yip 1997:15). Today however, the government has begun to adopt a more realistic stance that involves exploring the relationship between ethnicity and educational attainment. Questions pertaining to the nature of the educational input (e.g. the composition, nature and background of the student cohort), and the quality of the educational process itself, are now being addressed. According to Yip (1997:15), the problem of high educational wastage is, in a sense, only to be expected in a mass democratic system where



“the provision of equal access for all is bound to throw up a wide range of pedagogical and social needs arising from the diversified nature of any single cohort of students”.

This is logically sound, but worrying when high educational wastage is more prevalent amongst students from one ethnic group. In their article *“Where the drop-outs are likely to come from”*, George et al. examine the issue of children dropping out of primary schools. They report that those who did badly in schools and then dropped out came from the same type of background – one defined by lower economic status. More interestingly, they reveal that amongst the Malays, *“the drop-out rate was most acute”* (George et al, Straits Times, 21<sup>st</sup> August 1993). Malay children were five times more likely than Chinese children, and three times more likely than their Indian counterparts to drop out of primary school each year. The Prime Minister described the situation as *“worrying”*. It is worrying for the Malays, but perhaps more so for the education system. A group of students defined by their ethnicity, consistently under-performing, suggests that these students are being provided with a system of education that somehow does not work for them. Such a system is inefficient because of the high attrition rates amongst Malays, even if these rates can be explained by the home-school difference theory (see 3.5.1).

The chapter has thus far addressed the larger macro social context, and now narrows the perspective to provide a profile of the school.

### **5.11. The School Profile**

This profile is composed using data drawn from interviews, observations, incidental encounters, supplementary documentary data, and reflective notes. Data gathered during lesson observations and interviews with teachers and students of the two classes are *not* discussed here as they are viewed as primary or core data to be discussed and in detail in Chapters Six – Eight.

School-X is a government secondary school, with male and female students of all three ethnic groups. There are 22 classes which together hold 660 students. The Principal manages a team of 37 teaching staff and 11 non-teaching staff. He is aided by five heads of departments (HODs) who respectively manage the departments of ‘Physical Education and



Extra Curricular Activities’, ‘The Humanities’, ‘English and Literature’, ‘Science’, and ‘Discipline’<sup>9</sup>.

School-X started functioning in 1965, the year the school was built. In Singaporean terms it is an old school, with a warm, lived-in feel. The buildings – especially the canteen – are somewhat rundown, and lack the new squeaky-clean image that Singapore is generally known for. It is an average-sized school, with five interconnected buildings. In one of these are found the staff room, the library, the computer room and lower secondary classroom. The upper secondary classes are in another. The third is the school hall, the fourth is the canteen and the fifth holds the Science laboratories, the Home Economics kitchen and the venues for various extra curricular activities (henceforth referred to as E.C.A.).

The school day begins when the first bell rings at 7.20 a.m. Two days a week, the school ends at 1.50 p.m., another two days at 1.15 p.m., and the fifth day, at 12.05 p.m. (see Table 5.1). A period is 35 minutes long, and the day has between seven to ten periods. Break (or ‘Recess’) time for all students is 30 minutes long, from 9.50 a.m. to 10.20 a.m.

**Table 5.1: School-X time-table**

Time	7:30	8:05	8:40	9:15	9:50	10:20	10:55	11:30	12:05	12:40	1:15
Day	8:05	8:40	9:15	9:50	10:20	10:55	11:30	12:05	12:40	1:15	1:50
Mon					R				1B	1B	
Tue					E	Assembly		1A 1D			#### <sup>10</sup>
Wed		1A 1D			C	1B	1D ERP				
Thu			1D	1D	E					1B ERP	####
Fri	1D	1D	1B	1B	S S		1A		####	####	####

<sup>9</sup> In an interview with School-X’s HOD for Discipline, I was informed that the Ministry, in wanting to stress the importance of discipline in schools, had recently conferred ‘discipline’ with a departmental status, and a teacher in each school with HOD status (along with a financial remuneration).

<sup>10</sup> #### denotes early dismissal.

While the above describes a typical government school, School-X differs from other schools in two main ways. Firstly, it has a far greater percentage of Malay students than that found in an average government school (see Table 5.2). Compared with the 14% that constitute Singapore's Malay population, the Malay students in School-X represent 55% of the student population. Secondly, School-X students perform well below the national average at the GCE 'O' Level Examinations. In our interview, the Principal remarked on his disappointment upon recently seeing the graphs which showed how poorly his students had performed (compared to the national standards) in the national exams the year before. I asked to see these graphs, but was told that this would not be possible.

**Table 5.2: School-X Enrolment Figures for 1996**

<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
376	284	660
57%	43%	100%

<i>'Mother Tongue' Speakers</i>			
<i>Malay</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>Tamil</i>	<i>Others</i>
361	255	10	26
55%	39%	2%	4%

### 5.12. Principal's explanations for students' under-performance

#### Low quality intake

*"School-X gets students who generally have not performed well in the PSLE exam, and of our annual secondary one intake, more than 50% are usually Malays - and everyone knows how the Malays do not do well in school. When we work out pass rate percentages, perhaps we should do so according to the student population composition. Such statistics would reflect what kinds of students we get in the first place. Because of the poor quality of our intake, only 45% of our pupils are in Express classes, with the other 55% in Normal (Academic or Technical) classes."*

### **Unstable homes**

*"Many of our students come from broken homes. Some of them have several mothers, or live with men who are not their fathers, or move homes between different parents. They come from unstable homes, and often the home environment does not support or encourage learning. Also, our students may not have money to be in school. They work out of necessity, they need to make some money to support the family."*

### **Gang membership**

*"I know that some of my students belong to (street) gangs, and spend quite a lot of their time with their gangs outside school hours. I don't see any point in pretending that this does not exist, so I address it from the beginning of the year at the school assembly, and tell my students to stay away from gangs, and that the school won't tolerate this behaviour. It's very hard for us to control this, because we can only advice, but they will do what they want."*

### **Overburdened teachers**

*"We have a small enrolment compared to many other schools. For example, we have 133 students in four classes in secondary one, but they form three different streams. This means that fewer teachers have more preparations to do: there are more question (exam) papers to set, more duties to cover, to successfully run the three streams. The enrolment may be small, but the range of activities we offer must be the same as that of the big schools. These tasks have to be shared amongst a small number of staff."*

### **Age of teachers**

*"Sometimes it is frustrating when I need teachers, and the MOE sends me the over 50 year-olds. I am not saying that these teachers are not good or cannot teach well. I'm saying that our students because they get restless easily, (they) need to be motivated, need to have activity. The younger teachers have the energy and can push these students the way they need to be pushed. Also I do not- I **never** get a chance to pick my teachers."*

### **Inadequate physical facilities**

*"While we have sufficient land area, and enough computers, OHPs etc., we are short of building space, and don't have the special rooms we need. We need a History Room, a Geography room, a language laboratory. Because we don't have them, we are disadvantaged. Whatever we do, we do at a lower level. It is not our best because we don't have the rooms we need."*

### 5.13. How students come to be students at School-X

At the end of primary six, students submit to the MOE a list of six secondary schools (ranked from the first to the sixth choice) that they would want to attend. The MOE decides which school students are posted to based on a combination of how they perform in the PSLE, which six schools have been selected, and which schools have availability (availability is determined by general demand for the school).

Located in an area with a high density of schools, School-X does not have its own student-catchment area. According to the Principal, very few students come to School-X on their own accord:

*"It is the 'no choice' school because students come here only because they are posted to us. They don't ask for this school."*

There is also, according to the Principal, a perception amongst some Singaporeans that School-X is a Malay medium school and therefore only for Malays. This means that more Malays than non-Malays list School-X on their choice of six schools.

### 5.14. Student Profile

Described as *"the bottom of the pile"* by the HOD for English, the majority of School-X students hail from the bottom 5% of the PSLE cohort. Teachers describe them as obedient, and attentive during lessons, and say they understand and assimilate knowledge at a slower pace than students elsewhere. While discipline is not a problem, students are sometimes difficult to motivate. Generally, they seem to have a low sense of self-esteem, which teachers attribute to the poor performance.

According to the HOD however, students appear to be able to recognise a teacher who genuinely wants to help them learn, and when they feel this, they reciprocate accordingly by making more effort. He based this observation on student diary entries that he had read. Yet, his comments also reflect teacher expectations of students, and how little these students can be taught:

*"Nobody, not even these students, wants to fail, so we teachers have to equip them with some education, give them dignity. Even if that is all we can do".*

This comment suggests a certain resignation, and is similar in tone to the Principal's comment on how little can be achieved with poor calibre students.

### **5.15. Teacher Profile**

As mentioned in 5.12, School-X teachers are older than the Principal prefers. Teachers are observed by their HOD once a year, and, according to the HOD, the general attitude is *"lucky no video"*, i.e. they are thankful that their lessons are not videotaped as well. They prefer not to go for in-service training courses as they say that these are time-consuming. Furthermore, they do not like the fact that some of these courses evaluate them. When the HOD tried to get some of his English teachers to attend in-service courses, *"they seemed too bogged down"*. Also, there appears to be a teacher mind-set - that *"the more courses you attend, the more responsibilities you can be later made to take on"*.

### **5.16. Tone of School-X**

The following is an attempt to convey the tone and atmosphere of School-X through a narrative description of the first day of school. Included are descriptions of institutionalised rituals such as the daily morning and the weekly assembly.

#### **5.16.1. Morning Assembly**

I arrived at 7.15 am, and as I passed through the main gate, the two neatly turned-out prefects on gate-duty wished me *"Good morning"*. One asked if I was a parent or a teacher. I said I was a researcher, and was directed to the basketball court, for morning ceremony. Draped close to the gates, on the outer walls of the canteen, was a huge banner carrying the school motto: *"Knowledge for Progress"*. Gathered in the canteen, not attending the flag-raising ceremony, were the new secondary one students who had arrived with their parents. The first bell rang at 7.20, signalling that the school had five minutes to gather on the basketball court for morning assembly.

On my way, I passed notice boards which were mostly bare. (However, by the end of Term One in March, the eight glass-panelled notice boards displayed photographs depicting

different facets of life in School-X. There were photographs of the annual school road run; the annual speech and prize-giving ceremony; the secondary one orientation programme; the 21 recipients of scholarships from the MOE; students displaying appropriate attire for physical education; students displaying recommended hair styles for boys and girls; and the top-performing students from the year before. A separate notice board located outside the staff-room was entitled 'School-X'. It displayed photographs arranged hierarchically in four rows (reflecting the status and power) of Principal, Heads of Departments, teaching staff; supporting staff of secretaries, technicians and cleaners.)

On the basketball court, pupils stood, facing two flagpoles, with their classmates in pairs, with each class forming a row. The Principal and the Discipline Master (henceforth 'the DM') stood between the flagpoles, facing the entire school population, while the teachers stood in a line behind the student body. There was a prefect at each flagpole, one ready to raise the Singapore flag, and the other the school flag. I joined the line of teachers. When the second bell rang at 7.25, the DM issued, through a microphone, the command "*Sekolah Sedia!*"<sup>11</sup>, after which he ordered students to straighten their class rows, to stop fidgeting, and to stop talking. When there was silence, he signalled to a prefect to begin playing the national anthem over the sound system.

Apart from the Principal, the DM, and a handful of teachers who sang along to the anthem, most of the school population were silent. Both flags reached the top of the poles as the anthem came to an end. When the DM said "*The Pledge*", everyone held their right hand, fist to heart, and recited the Singapore pledge.

The DM then made announcements regarding the programme for the day, and stopped when he noticed some students talking: "*Listen to me as I'm making announcements. Do not move. Prefects pick up those who are moving and talking. Form teachers pick out those with long hair*".

He paused as prefects and teachers moved down the various class rows, stopping to speak to the offending students. He then said that all classes would be with their form teacher for the first three periods of the day, after which the class time-table would resume. The general assembly would be in period five, when the school would gather in the hall. At this point, he

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<sup>11</sup> This means 'School attention!' Parade commands in Singapore, are issued in the National language, Malay.

passed the microphone to the Principal who announced that three new teachers had joined the school. He called these teachers up to the front, and introduced each in turn to the school, telling students that now that they knew the teachers' names, they would be able to greet them when they met them in the school corridors, canteen, etc.

Following this, the DM oversaw the uniform dispersal of students. I followed the teachers as they returned to the staff-room.

Morning assembly (as this is referred to in Singapore) had been interesting for me to witness. While it had been a reassuringly familiar scene, the playing-out of an institutionalised ritual in Singapore schools, I realised that I had just witnessed old experiences with fresh eyes because I had been away from Singapore schools for several years. What I found striking was the strong and forceful authority of the DM, the focus on discipline, and the absence of a warm 'welcome-back' spirit – the school was, after all, resuming after a six-week holiday. The nonchalant reaction of the teachers around me to the DM suggested that the experience was everyday.

### **5.16.2.      *Secondary One Orientation Programme***

At 8 am, I was in the school hall to observe the beginning of the secondary one orientation programme. Apart from students and their parents, there were the Principal, the HODs, the Pastoral Care and Career Guidance (PCCG) Co-ordinator, and secondary one form teachers. The programme began with the Principal's welcome speech. He introduced the school to students and parents, and briefly described the school policy, saying that it would be discussed more thoroughly later, at the general assembly. While his tone was welcoming and kind, he emphasised that students were to try their best in their studies, and that parents should do as much as they could towards this end. He called upon the PCCG Co-ordinator who explained how the 'pastoral care' programme aims to help students fit into, and cope with school life. She explained that the 'peer support' programme involves older students helping younger ones adjust to different aspects of school life. She reassured parents that the school would use the two-day programme to help students feel comfortable with their new surroundings. She then introduced the Head of Department for Extra Curricular Activities (ECA) who stressed that a rounded education can only be achieved with motivated participation in ECA.



The final speaker was the DM who spoke generally about school rules. In this brief talk, he explained how these rules are for everyone's benefit, and stressed that in order for the school to function effectively, these rules are always to be respected. He explained how obeying school rules is important to succeeding in school. It is very important that students come (punctually) to school everyday, and the DM stressed that this is the responsibility of the parents. He emphasised the importance of parents' absolute co-operation, and said that the general assembly a week later would explain to students the importance of discipline. Everyone was then told to proceed down to the school canteen for refreshments.

The students had, on the whole, listened attentively, with some looking around with curiosity. The parents on their part seemed respectful of the Principal and his staff as they listened closely to the various addresses.

I returned to the staff-room to make reflective notes of what I had observed. The only teachers there were those who were not form teachers. They were busy attending to their work.

### **5.16.3.        *General Assembly***

At 10.20 a.m. the school gathered in the hall for general assembly. I sat at the back of the hall, with the rest of the teachers. The DM spent ten minutes organising students: he told them not to talk and to behave themselves; each class was asked to stand in a single file (from the front to the back of the hall). When all classes were lined side by side, students were told to sit on the floor. The Principal then welcomed his students back, saying that he hoped they had had a good holiday. He said that as he wanted them to fit back into school life again, he would begin by reminding them of the school motto: "*Knowledge for Progress*", which he projected on an overhead transparency (OHT). This was followed by the school philosophy, which he read aloud:

### **The School Philosophy**

School-X aims to provide our students with an all-rounded education to enable them to enter the job market, and to go on to further education in vocation and tertiary institutes.

I found it interesting that the school philosophy's first aim is to enable pupils to enter the job market, suggesting that many School-X pupils proceed from Secondary Four/Five to the working world. This philosophy stresses the immediate future, the practical tangibles of the here and now, instead of a more academic future. The next OHT bore the school policy:

### **The School Policy**

1. To provide a curriculum that caters for the varying academic abilities of our students
2. To encourage a sense of self-discipline within our pupils
3. To promote a healthy life-style in our students through active mass participation in sports and ECA
4. To expose our pupils to culture and to encourage their participation in the creative arts
5. To foster the correct attitudes of social behaviour towards the family, the community, and the nation

As he went through each of these, the Principal stressed the importance of item number five, saying that if a person did not have these correct attitudes, he or she could not be considered educated. This corresponds with how schools inculcate values that promote social cohesion

(see 5.6.1). This is seen again, but on a more micro level in the next OHT describing the ‘code of conduct’:

**Code of Conduct**

We, the students of School-X sincerely promise:

- To uphold the name of our school
- To obey the school rules
- To do our best in all our endeavours
- To be courteous and polite at all times
- And to serve our school with honesty, diligence and dedication

In stressing the importance of obeying school rules, he listed a few ‘dos and don’ts’. All students were to buy their copy of the student’s diary, a handbook to be treated “*like their bible, an absolute must*”. Students have to bring their diary to school every day, using the section on ‘daily diary schedule’ to write reminders regarding homework, test dates, etc. (see Appendix D:329).

Students must do their written work using only black ballpoint pens, and must have all their textbooks within two days. They must not hold jobs outside school, and are not to join outside gangs. He invited all the students to join his ‘gang’ instead, as “*the Principal’s gang is always the most powerful*”. The students laughed, and he continued, saying that the school would not tolerate smoking, and threatened that if a student gets caught, “*then God help you!*”. He repeated “*No joining gangs, no smoking, no working for pocket money!*”

Adopting a lighter tone, he discussed appropriate physical appearance, saying that appearance is very important, and that teachers often judge students on their appearance. Teachers appreciate students who make an effort to come to school neatly dressed for it shows that they respect teachers and want to learn. Students must dress neatly at all times, so that they feel good, so that they can then carry on with the business of studying. It appears that the Principal (as well as the system, I suspect) places a high premium on neatness.

Boys are not to sport long hair, and tinted hair would not be tolerated. At this point, he pointed at a boy, ordering him to stand. He asked the boy what class he was in, and when told "3A", the Principal responded:

*"What a disgrace, to have long hair, and to be from 3A!"*

Other students jeered at the fact that he was in trouble despite being in the best secondary three class. The Principal then singled out another student who was not wearing the school tie, and who was sporting a fashionable top-heavy haircut (with tinted hair). While the first student was allowed to sit, this offender was called to the front of the hall, to stand beside the Principal for the rest of the assembly period. Students were reminded that the school rule states that the school tie be worn all day, every Tuesday (as this is 'general assembly' day). He joked that he too did not like wearing a tie as he found it uncomfortable, but that he had it on because it is important to be neatly turned out.

Continuing with school rules: no jewellery except for gold or gold-coloured stud-earrings on girls would be tolerated. He reminded students that they were not to be seen walking around the school during class time, and in order to leave the classroom (even to go to the toilet) they would first have to obtain a pass card from the subject teacher. He ended his talk saying that the school and all the teachers would do their best to teach them well, but that what students got out of school would, at the end of the day, depend to a large extent on what they put in themselves. He told them that if they had any questions or problems, they should feel free to visit him in his office, before school, during recess or after school, but not otherwise as curriculum time should always be respected, and should always be well managed.

The DM dismissed the school class by class, telling each class when and through which exit to leave the hall. The students were mostly quiet, and classes left orderly in single file. Throughout the assembly, there had been minimal talking amongst, they had sat still on the floor, listening attentively, and laughing at the jokes. There seemed to be a clear delineation of roles between the Principal and the DM. While the former was firm but supportive and approachable, the latter was in-charge of structure, order, and keeping students in line.

Back in the staff-room, I presented both teachers of my study – TB and TD – a letter in which I expressed my gratitude, thanking them for allowing me to observe their lessons, saying that I appreciated how my presence in their lesson would possibly make them feel uncomfortable. They read the letter and replied that it was indeed difficult being observed

and for three whole weeks as well. They said that there was little they could do but try and make the best of the situation.

I spent the last two hours of the school day in the staff-room making more notes. Not having a table of my own, I was seated on a sofa at the end of the room. This itself attracted attention, and I felt I was occupying the teachers' resting and chatting place. But there were no desks available. Thankfully, at the end of the day, a teacher offered to clear away his books that were on the unoccupied table next to his. I was relieved to have secured a less conspicuous place in the staff room.

### **5.17. First Day Reflections**

I left the school at the end of the first day feeling that fieldwork and data collection were going to be a difficult and trying time. I told myself to be realistic: the teachers' reactions were understandable. Whilst I had had a choice regarding where I would conduct the study, they had had none regarding being observed by me. They had their agenda, and I had mine. I could sense their resentment towards me for interfering in their lessons, and at the Principal for having given me access to their classrooms. I explained that the reason I was observing their classes was because of the nature of the study and not because the Principal had offered their classes. I did not want them to harbour negative feelings towards the Principal, feelings generated by the belief that the Principal was picking on them, or had failed to protect them from me.

I also felt anxious about how I would collect data: I wondered how far to go, how much to ask for, and worried if I would be able to get sufficient data without annoying the teachers by asking for too much. I realised that between us, different and somewhat opposing emotions were at work, and I resolved to work towards nurturing their understanding. I knew too that my anxieties regarding what questions to ask, when etc. would make me extra sensitive towards those who were not supportive of my study. It was therefore important that I recognise this so that I could step outside of myself (and my 'ethnocentric' view point), to see things from their point of view, to be a little less sensitive, and to do my best, given the situation, in data collection.

During the day, I had talked with other teachers who had asked me questions about who I was and the exact nature of my research. In my reply, I often used the phrase 'classroom culture'. It was interesting that although the teachers knew exactly what I meant with the term, they were not sure if studying this could be a benefit to the teaching profession. It was clear that some thought little of research into teaching, and told me so, stressing that the interference such research causes does the profession more harm than good. I was also asked if I had had any teaching experience, and if I was old enough to be doing a Ph.D. Clearly, my presence was not welcomed, and there was generally little appreciation for research. I answered their questions as fairly as I could, trying not to be defensive, but to understand the sentiments and emotions behind the questions. I realised that these teachers felt that they had a job to do, and I was in the way.

## **5.18. Summary**

The approach of this study - microethography - explores how local negotiation works with external influences to produce the microculture of the classroom. The chapter has presented these external influences by describing the macro social contexts. Singapore society has undergone widespread social-economic and linguistic changes in the last four decades, and the macro descriptions presented have endeavoured to reflect this. Descriptions focused on how the leaders of Singapore have embraced education (particularly linguistic engineering within education) as a means to deliver social cohesion and economic success.

Looking within the education system, I have described its character and culture in general, and the character of the Singapore student in particular. A critique of the system suggests some of its weaknesses, especially with regard to issues pertaining to inequality of opportunity and performance.

The chapter then narrowed the presentation of the macro social context to present a profile of the school. Students and teachers were described on a general level, before I sought to convey the tone and atmosphere of School-X through narrative descriptions of three events that were part of the first day of school. The aim was to present the reader with the tone and character of School-X such that s/he would then be better able to understand and interpret interaction in the classroom.

At this point, having been guided through Singapore and School-X, the reader is ready to step into Class B and Class D. Chapter Six makes this step, moving from the macro to the micro. Descriptions of the two rooms are presented as features of the discourse setting. Then with the stage finally set, the action begins with descriptions and analysis of the first English lesson observed in each class.



## **Chapter 6. Classroom Microcultures: In search of emergent research issues**

### **6.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents a description and analysis of the first lesson (LB1 and LD1) observed in each class. As classroom culture is usually made more explicit at the start of the year when teachers set-up modes of expected and acceptable behaviour, I was curious to observe and analyse how each of the two teachers conducted early lessons. In early lessons, the culture is new and not yet of definite shape; consequently teacher and student behaviour is more a reflection of past experiences than of the new class group. I wanted to know if these early lessons would correspond with later lessons, and to see if interaction patterns were consistent or changed across time. More importantly, the chapter describes my initial search for emergent research issues. These are issues belonging to the case, or emic issues, which were used consequently to direct data analysis.

Lesson descriptions begin with a list of all student questions. Each lesson is broken into its constituent parts, which are defined by main lesson activities. A general summary of each part is provided, and student questions and their location within larger teacher-student interactions are described. Data description then moves towards analysis and interpretation as recurrent interaction patterns and themes are outlined and illustrated. After each lesson is considered in this way, the two lessons are then compared with each other.

In order for the reader to be better placed to analyse and understand how classroom processes are negotiated, the setting must first be described. Whilst the previous chapter described the macro elements of the context, this chapter provides a micro description of the two classrooms based on notes made during observations and photographs taken at the end of the ten-week duration of fieldwork.

### **6.2. The Classroom Setting**

The school is 31 years old, and this is perceived as old in Singaporean terms. Its classrooms are typical of those constructed in the period of rapid educational expansion in the sixties and

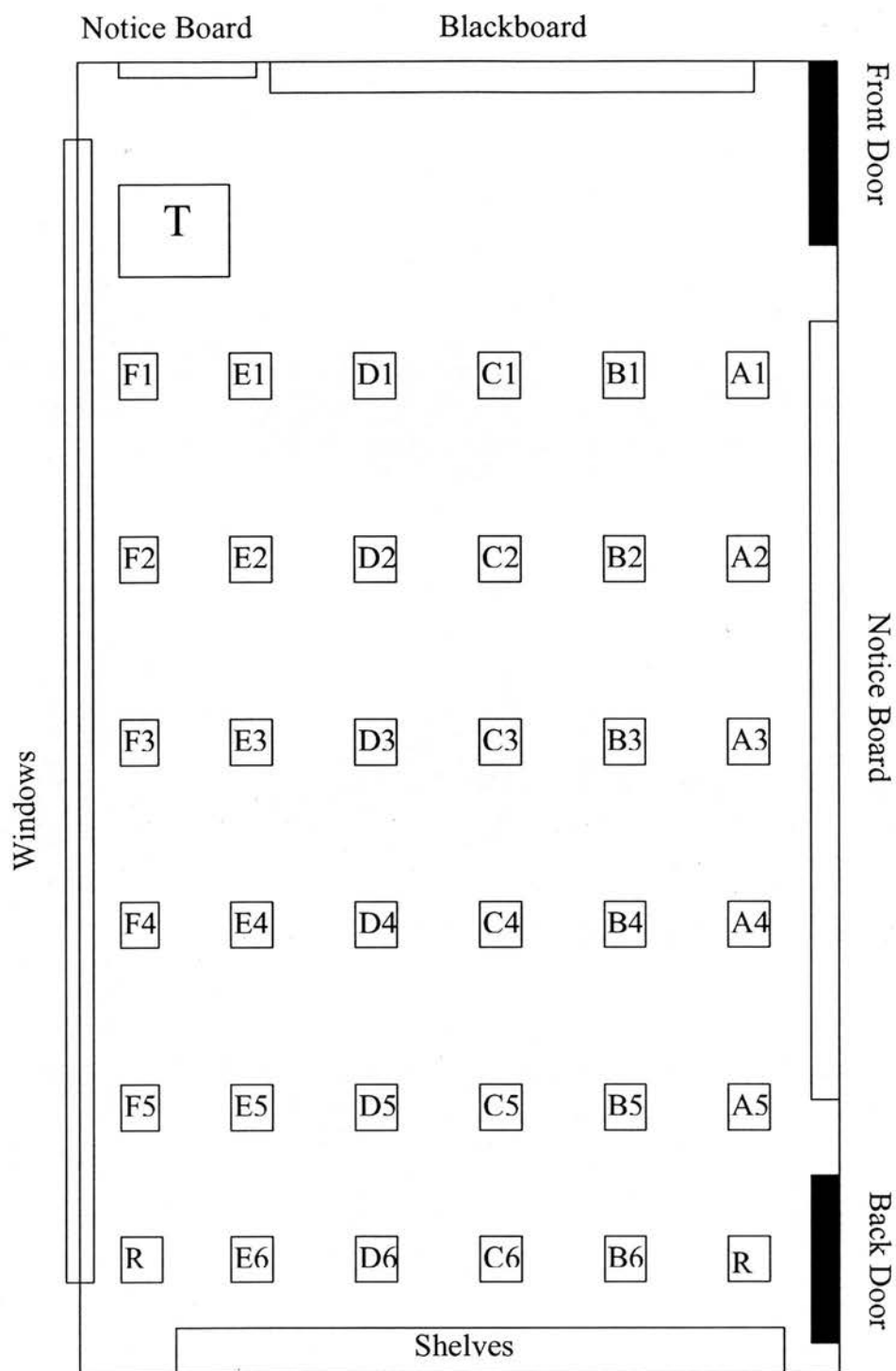
seventies. They are rectangular rooms accessed through corridors that run along the length of the school building. (See Figure 6.1 below.)

The classrooms have two doors located on either end of the length of the room. Between these doors are walls with notice boards. The teacher's desk is in the front corner, opposite the front door. Covering more than half of the front wall is the blackboard, and directly behind the teacher's desk is a notice board. In both classrooms, this notice board displays official notices. Suspended above the blackboard is a screen for the overhead projector (OHP). Classes do not have their own OHP, instead there is one to be shared between every two classes. Across the width of the back wall of the classroom are shelves. The fourth wall of the classroom, running from the teacher's desk to the back, is covered mostly with windows, from about waist-high to ceiling. Student desks are arranged singularly, in six rows and six columns. Both classrooms are similar in the above ways, but they vary in decoration, in terms of what is displayed on notice boards and the general state of neatness and cleanliness.

The notice boards in both rooms are organised along similar formats. The one just behind the teacher's desk displays information such as a diagram showing the layout of the school; the school calendar; the programme for weekly assemblies; the year planner; information on extra-curricular-activity registration; instructions for fire drill; and a large poster which outlines a class day-by-day duty roster. This roster lists the names of students who are responsible for sweeping the floor, cleaning the blackboard, and arranging tables into straight lines everyday. The roster poster in Class B holds more information, providing the names of the Form teacher, the class monitor and monitoress. It also tells students to:

*"Remember to do your duties! It is important. Follow all Instructions!"*

Apart from this, Class B has an additional notice listing the names of class representatives (two each) for audio-visual aid, sports and games, magazines and contests. Whilst notices are arranged neatly on the Class B notice board, they are haphazardly pinned up in Class D. Here, the 'Duty Roster Poster', having fallen off the notice board, lay unattended on the shelf just below.



**Figure 6.1: Layout of Classrooms**

T = teacher

R= researcher

A1-F5 = students

The notice boards across the length of the classroom are sectioned off into different subject areas. In Class B, each section has its own heading, and the displays beneath are colourful and neatly arranged. Moving from the front of the room to the back, these read as follows:

*'1B Hottest News!'*

This presents information on students selected as 'monitor' and 'monitoress', students representing the class in inter-class tournaments, etc.

*'Sport: Football and Basketball'*

This displays a selection of magazine cut-outs of sports stars.

*'English'*

This presents a collection of newspaper articles (brought in by students) that have been discussed during English lessons.

*'Current Affairs'*

This is a collection of newspaper articles brought in by students.

*'Geography'*

This section is made up mostly of geography articles, and a diagram of the Earth.

*'History'*

This is a collection of photographs of Egyptian sculptures, and information and pictures of Sir Stamford Raffles, the founder of Singapore.

In Class D, the notice boards are covered with a small assortment of material. There is only one heading which reads *'We Love English'*. While there is nothing displayed directly below this, the rest of the board space has an ad-hoc arrangement of a few newspaper articles and some sample pieces of student work (done as a group work assignment for English). At the back of the classroom, pictures of football stars decorate a narrow notice board in the corner.

Both classrooms have also been decorated to different degrees with decorations made by students from colour paper and tinsel. These were put up for the 'Chinese New Year' and

‘Hari Raya’<sup>12</sup> celebrations in the middle of the term. Again, while there appears to be a pattern to the decorations in Class B, the Class D decorations are sparse and erratic. In general appearance, whilst both classrooms are clean, the furniture in Class B is arranged in a more orderly fashion and tables are in straight lines. Having set the stage by describing the physical setting in both classrooms, I now provide a brief description of its players: the students and teachers.

All students are at least twelve years old, with most of them turning thirteen in the school year. Both classes are multicultural and multilingual, comprising students from all three ethnic groups - the Chinese, Malays and Indians. The ethnic composition in each class is as follows:

**Table 6.1: Student Composition in Each Class by Ethnicity**

Class B(N=31 students)		Class D(N=33 students)	
Chinese	18 (56.3%)	Chinese	3 (10.0%)
Malays	11 (34.4 %)	Malays	25(83.3%)
Indians	3 (9.4%)	Indians	2 (6.7%)

Table 6.1 reveals how the classes vary in ethnic composition – especially in the numbers of Malay and Chinese students they each have: 56 % of Class B is Chinese, compared with only 10 % in Class D. 34 % of Class B is Malay, but in Class D, this figure is 83 %.

Both teachers are female, in their late 30s, or early 40s. TB is Malay and TD is Indian, and both were born and educated in Singapore. Both speak their native language (respectively Malay and Punjabi), and English. At the time when I first entered their classrooms for observations, I knew only that TB had taught secondary one before and that TD was new to the school, to the level (secondary one), and to the stream (Normal Technical).

<sup>12</sup> These are the two major celebrations in Singapore for the Chinese and Malays ethnic groups respectively. They are national holidays, and all schools commemorate the religious or cultural significance of these events with celebratory concerts.

### 6.3. Identifying Student Questions

As explained earlier (in 4.7.2), student questions was the first emergent research issue. It belongs to the case, and was as such an emic issue, and it later prompted interest in other aspects of classroom interaction. In order to reflect the importance of student questions as an initial research interest, the analysis of first lessons in this chapter begins with a list of student questions in each class. The two lessons are divided into parts, each of which addresses and locates student questions that occur in it.

Before presenting the lessons, I would like to consider how I identified an utterance as a question. Not all student questions during an English lesson are articulated with a rising intonation, nor do they always adopt an interrogative form. From a functional point of view, these questions perform the speech acts of requesting information, seeking confirmation or seeking clarification. A functional definition sees a question as an utterance performing the speech act of asking.

Students in an English class can ask a variety of questions related to language learning. Some of these could be semantically or grammatically motivated. Questions could, for example, concern an item (semantic or grammatical), as students ask if an L1 item equals an L2 item, or if there is a contrast between L1 and L2 with regard to a particular item. Upon coming across an unknown vocabulary item, students may ask their teacher for its linguistic equivalent in the target language. Such student questions have been investigated by Raabe (1986) who explored how learner questions were influenced by L1 and L3.

There are other types of questions which are more socially motivated. Students could ask their teacher clarification questions regarding procedure – i.e. how to do a task. This study focuses on student questions directed to the teacher. The next section describes the first lesson observed<sup>13</sup> in each of the two classes. The main objective is to describe the lessons in sufficient detail such that features and themes of classroom discourse can be noted. Once noted, features and themes present data analysis with sign-posts, to be used as guidance for subsequent analysis. I also choose to analyse these first lessons because I am curious to know how each teacher handles her class early in the year in terms of how they set up a

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<sup>13</sup> These lessons are the first ones observed, but actually each class' second English lesson (see Chapter 4.5.1).

framework for future lessons. For this reason, these lessons are the only ones transcribed in their entirety (see Appendix F:335 and Appendix G:345).

### 6.4. Lesson B1

This first lesson observed (henceforth referred to as LB1) takes place on the fourth day of the school year. In its thirty-five minute duration, students ask TB nineteen questions. These questions have been extracted from the transcript of LB1, documented in full in Appendix F:335. Each question is preceded by its line number in the lesson transcript.

See Appendix E:333 for transcription conventions.

**Table 6.2: Student Questions in Lesson B1**

276	SF4	=tcher, we just put wrapping paper, can?
281	S	=tcher, can paste things?
298	SF4	tcher, how do you know we really read it, or not?
333	SD2	=can we design own book review at home?
335	S	=can do our own print-out, huh?
385	S	=tcher, must have photograph, huh?
389	SD5	tcher, when we are babies huh?
399	SF4	=tcher, when you, uh, you are in kindergarten can?
405	SF4	=tcher, don't have one photo, how?
413	SF4	=tcher, my sister's photo, can?
416	SD5	=tcher, the photo must be only us?
438	SE5	=tcher got funny one, can bring?
446	SF4	tcher, I though you are buying for us.
448	S	you order the file for us, can?
449	S	order for us tcher
453	S	tcher, must be sky blue huh?
454	S	dark blue, can?
456	S	=tcher, cannot find how?
459	SF4	tcher, if cannot find, how?

‘Tcher’ is the abbreviated form for ‘teacher’ and is a common way that students refer to female teachers (male teachers are usually called ‘Sir’). What is immediately apparent is that students use a non-standard variety of English. This is Singlish, the variety of English most Singaporeans use. Its use is far less common in classrooms in top-end schools, but even in these schools, students use it in their interactions with each other as a natural expression of their Singaporean identity. In lower-end schools, this code is used even by teachers during



their lessons as they switch between it and the more formal, educated variety - Standard Singapore English. In School-X, Singlish is the variety of English most used by students in and outside the classroom.

The majority of student questions seek confirmation and clarification *not* on grammatical or semantic points, but on procedure. Students seek information which will enable them to do things correctly or appropriately. Looking at the line numbers on the left, these nineteen questions are seen to occur in clusters. Given that they seek procedural information, they occur at points of the lesson when TB issues instructions. Eleven of these questions are interjected (signalled by the '=' symbol), indicating that in their eagerness to ask, confirm or clarify, students do not wait for TB to solicit questions.

LB1 is not a real lesson; there is no 'pre-assessment', 'learning experience', or 'evaluation' phase. No actual teaching of English occurs. Instead, TB threshes out issues, setting the stage for future lessons:

364     T     Are there any questions? Because next week we will be starting lessons  
              **proper**. These past two days I just want to thresh out anything, about the  
              books whatever. Ok? Any questions?

The lesson begins with TB stressing the importance of reading, telling students how they need to read more to improve their English. This is a lead in to the first of the three parts of the lesson. Data description looks in turn at each part, along with its student questions.

#### **6.4.1. Part One: Newspaper article sharing (lines 1-177)**

This part sees TB describing a newspaper-article sharing activity that she says will become regular lesson feature. She installs this activity by first getting students to share (in whole-class discussions) articles that they have read the day before. She informs them that henceforth, they should guide their article-reading at home by mentally composing answers to 'Wh' questions so that they will be better prepared to speak about the article the next day. She shares, at length, an article she read the day before, about a cultural exchange programme between students in Singapore and Japan. The activity closes with her re-emphasising the importance of acquiring the reading habit. Throughout this first part of the lesson, TB dominates the floor and at no point do students ask questions.

#### **6.4.2. Part Two: Reading Files and Book Reviews (lines 178 – 362)**

Transfer to the second part of the lesson occurs when TB brings up the topic of reading files which students have to prepare for their weekly reading period. Teacher and students negotiate at length regarding:

- exact type of folder file that all students will use
- exact blue colour of the file
- date when students will have files ready

TB describes how she expects the cover of the file to be decorated, and the kinds of book review worksheets that students will have to do. During this discussion, she reminds students that they have to read, speak and write the language to learn it.

#### **6.4.3. Student Questions in Part Two**

The first question in LB1 occurs when TB sets students homework over the weekend: they have to each buy a file that the class has agreed upon and to decorate its cover. She has brought in sample files from the year before.

- 250     T     ((tr writes on b/b:  
              “My Reading File  
              Name  
              Class                   ”))  
              This ((pointing at words on b/b)) must appear on the cover here ((points at  
255           file)). Ok? So you have “My Reading file” and you have your name and your  
              class. That’s all. Ok? For the cover. After that if you want to design, let’s say  
              design a- ((she picks up sample files)) as I said these are not the best. Some of  
              the ones that were done were very very attractive but I’ve returned half of  
              them ok? So- may be you can come up with some nice creative ideas. So that  
260           will be your homework for the weekend. Buy the file, make it nice.

Having been issued instructions, SF4 interjects, asking if students can decorate the file with wrapping paper:

- 276     SF4    =tcher, we just put wrapping paper, can?

This is closely followed by another student (in line 281) asking if students can paste (pictures, etc.) on the cover.

281 S =tcher, can paste things?

Shortly after this, as the teacher describes book review worksheets that she will be distributing to students, she mentions that some students prefer to prepare their own book review sheets, with their own formats:

331 T There are sometimes students who are very creative- very good with the computer. They do not want to do the review that we prepared for them.

To this, SD2 interjects:

333 SD2 =can we design own book review at home?

334 T if you think you want to do a review with the computer, it's ok.

Another learner confirms if they can create their own computer-designed book review print-outs:

335 S =can do our own print-out, huh?

336 T yes. Can. If you have a computer at home and you want to do a design using the computer, then you can do so.

TB's replies are consistent in the way she agrees to what students propose.

#### **6.4.4. Part Three: Confirmations, reminders and lesson closure (lines 363 – 466)**

The final part of the lesson sees TB clarifying with students the number of exercise books they need to prepare for English. She tells them that for the next lesson on Monday, they will need their English textbook, and a photograph of themselves.

379 T ((tr writes on b/b:  
"1. Textbook  
2. Any old photograph of yourself"))  
Monday, bring your textbook: and- right- number two.  
Ok, your textbook and number two- because Monday will be the unit in your  
384 textbook on 'Growing up'.  
S =tcher, must have photograph, huh?

#### 6.4.5. Student Questions in Part Three

Before TB mentions the photograph, a student, having read the instructions on the blackboard, interjects, clarifying if they have to bring a photograph. As this information is already on the board, it may be the case that the student is using what appears to be a question to bring up the topic of the photograph.

In her reply, TB provides more details, saying:

386 T now listen, I want each of you to go home and look through your photo album- and look for old- old photographs. I do not want last years-lah. Look for photos when you were much much younger.

Notice TB's use of the non-standard 'lah' (in line 387) to emphasise the fact that she does not want recent photographs. TB seems to be using 'lah' to serve a social function – to bridge the gap between her and her students. In doing so, she increases the likelihood that her students do as instructed. A second cluster of student questions – centered on childhood photographs follows:

389 SD5 =tcher, when we are babies huh?  
399 SF4 =tcher, when you, uh, you are in kindergarten can?  
405 SF4 =tcher, don't have one photo, how?  
413 SF4 =tcher, my sister's photo can?  
416 SD5 =tcher, the photo must be only us?  
438 SE5 =tcher got funny one, can bring?

All questions clarify the kind of photograph that students have to bring, and all but one are unsolicited, showing once again that students are keen to bring the right photograph. The final cluster of student questions occurs towards the end of the lesson when, as part of lesson closure, TB reminds students about their weekend homework:

443 T remember your homework for the weekend. Number one – get all your exercise books ready. Number two- get your reading files ready. Buy it. Get it ready.

Seven questions follow, the first dressed as a statement:

446 SF4 tcher, I thought you are buying for us.

The teacher has not, at any point in the lesson, said that she would buy the files on the students' behalf from the school bookshop. She has in fact, just two lines earlier, reminded students to buy the file. SF4 knows this and seems to be indirectly suggesting that TB buy the files for the class. Two lines later, he asks directly:

448 SF4 you order the file for us, can?

F4 receives strong support from his classmates, who even plead with TB to do the same:

449 SS order for us, tcher!

Two more questions follow, confirming the exact shade of blue the file has to be:

453 S tcher, must be sky blue huh?

454 S dark blue, can?

A student asks what would happen if he is unable to find (and purchase) a file of the right shade of blue:

456 S =tcher, cannot find how?

This question differs from others in that it is a hypothetical - "What happens if...?" question. It can be read as a genuine question from a student who is worried about being unable to purchase the right kind of file. However, the student could also be gauging how serious TB is about her instructions, and how much leeway students have to disobey them. TB's reply is both quick and reassuring:

457 T can find. There are so many in the shops.

Another student persists:

459 SF4 tcher, if cannot find, how?

The teacher responds:

460 T if cannot find, find. ((tr says this with a smile and sts laugh))

A potentially difficult question is handled in what appears to be a flippant manner. TB code-switches to Singlish as she responds, telling students that she expects that they *will* find the right file, thereby not leaving any room for students not to. She manages to simultaneously assert her authority and make students laugh.

Before the description of student questions can be completed, one last question needs to be discussed. It occurs in the second part of the lesson as students are being told about their weekly reading period; the reading behaviour that is expected of them; and how they will be graded for reading:

- 295 T Remember I told you we are going to award **marks**, right? One year minimum 20 books. So when we check we will see from here ((i.e. by looking at the 'Contents Page')) how many books you have read.

At this point, SF4 asks:

- 298 SF4 tcher, how do you know we really read it, or not?

The student is keen to know how TB would know if students have indeed read the books they have listed in the 'Contents Page' of the file. This page is pasted on the inside of their reading file. Sitting at the back of the classroom, I remember my reaction to this question. I was surprised at the student's boldness – particularly in a Singaporean classroom. To reveal to the teacher that he knows that he could cheat with the 'Contents Page' is surely not good student behaviour. It is not part of the good image that Singaporean students frequently want to project. Yet, it was an excellent question, and I was intrigued to know how the teacher would respond.

- 299 T ok. Right. Very good question. How do we know whether you read or not? I will- when you come to the class during Reading period, I will check the book, ok. And roughly you will tell me what page you are at and so on. Roughly. Over the years, a teacher really knows how to tell whether a person really reads or a person do not read. Some students are very clever. They don't  
304 read. They just take the book and copy the front page. Normally the story- the front part you have the review telling you what the story is about right? Ok. Please do not cheat. Remember I told you – it is important – if you cheat you are not going to improve yourself. No point having **20** books but it's not the books that you read. It's better to have five books but you really read, isn't it?  
309 No point having **20** books- **Wow! Wonderful!** You read 20 books but actually don't read you know. You just copy. I hope you are honest people and remember you are going to improve yourself, ok? So you cannot cheat.

After remarking that SF4's question is a very good one, TB describes some of the things teachers do to test if students are indeed reading, adding that over the years, teachers acquire a skill which allows them to *know* when students read and when they pretend to do so. She reveals that she knows how students can cheat in their reviews by reading book summaries located in the front of the book. She shows she knows that they can review a book without actually having read it. With this, she lets them know that she is on to what they could do. Eventually however, she tells them not to cheat, appealing first to their honesty and then to their hopes to improve their competence in the language. TB handles a potentially tricky question remarkably well. She manages to assert her authority as an all-knowing/perceiving teacher that students should not try to fool, if only for their own sakes.

#### **6.4.6. Lesson Closure**

The lesson closes with TB reminding students of their weekend homework, and of what they need to bring to the next lesson.

- 461     T     Ok. Right. Your reading files. Get ((them)) ready. And look at your old photo album. Clear? ((it's almost the end of the period, and sts start to look restless. The bell rings))
- T     thank you, class
- SS    ((sts stand)) thank you, (TB) ((they turn around to face me)) Thank
- 466             you, Miss Sandhu.

TB initiates the closing ritual, typical in Singaporean schools, by thanking the class. They respond as they have been taught to do so over six years of schooling, by standing and thanking (in unison) first TB, then me, as they would any staff or guest in the classroom.

#### **6.4.7. Salient Interaction Patterns and Themes in Lesson B1**

Moving beyond description to analysis, the following are the salient interaction patterns and themes of LB1.

- **Installing classroom procedure**

TB spent most of the lesson talking about what the class will be doing in future lessons. She talked in detail about how students will share newspaper articles they have read, describing



how this activity will be carried out (lines 167 – 177). She also talked at length of the reading habit, the weekly reading period, and reading files (lines 178 – 347). The lesson installed procedure for future lesson features. Interestingly, TB did this through teacher-student negotiation, as seen when she had students vote for their preferred type and colour of file:

- 185 T I think yesterday you people were in- you people are in favour of the punch-hole type, right?  
189 T ok, let me just count the hands. How many of you would like this kind of file?  
192 T so, I think this is the majority. The majority, right?  
197 T What about colour? You want to standardise?  
213 T ok. How many people prefer blue? ((some sts raise hands)) How many people in this room? What is the majority? I believe there are 33 of us. How many in this class?

Later, exactly when students will have their files ready was again a collective decision:

- 261 T By the ti::me- by I think next week, by:: uh, ok- we look at the majority again. By, let's say, Wednesday, it's all ok? Can you get it done by Wednesday?

- **Detailed teacher instructions**

TB invested time and effort delivering detailed instructions which informed students of exactly what she expected of them. This was seen in her instructions regarding how students should read newspaper articles whilst keeping 'Wh' questions in mind:

- 30 T So, next time when you read, at least remember, remember the details- 'Wh' questions, right, ((writes on b/b: "Wh – who, what, what, why, how." sts are silent and attentive to what the teacher is writing on b/b)) Always remember, who, where, what, when, how, ok? These are very useful guide questions. In other words, if you read an article, you should be able to tell me, where. Could it be in Asia, or even as far as America? Who? Who...

- **Frequent student questions**

As discussed earlier, these questions clarified or confirmed 'correct' procedure. Students seemed to see it as important that they act correctly. There also appeared to be key players in the classroom (SF4 and SD5) who influenced the lesson by frequently asking and answering questions. When they asked questions, their more quiet classmates listened to TB's answers, suggesting that these questions were also perhaps relevant to them.

- **Shaping 'good', socially responsible people**

TB's lesson included instances of internal and external socialisation (Allwright, 1996) where TB socialised students into becoming good and responsible people, in class, and at home:

- 94     T     how many of you when you eat at hawker centre, you bring back your bowl to the: hawker? How many of you do that? When you eat at the hawker centre, or even let's say MacDonald's, right- do you just take whatever things you want to dispose off and put into the bin? Or just leave on the table?
- 99     T     how many of you can honestly say that after you've eaten, you take back the bowl, and give back the bowl, and say "Thank you". How many of you do that?

TB told students that they should help their mother with the housework (lines 110), and be more polite when borrowing things from each other:

- 144   T     You want to borrow things from your friends. How many of you say "Please, can I borrow your pencil?", whatever? Do you? Or you just say, "Come, lend me". Or sometimes worse still, they just take and don't say anything, you assume that that's your friend and he doesn't mind. Then after you return after using, you just say, "That's your book". No 'thank you', nothing.

TB even commented on the 'Ugly Singaporean':

- 159   T     they litter, despite the fine- they litter here, they litter there. The new flats, for example, Marine Parade, all beautifully done up now- upgraded now- they look like condominium and so on. But the people, the social habits still never change. They just dump things anywhere they like. They spit anywhere they like. This is not nice. This is what you call the ugly Singaporean.

- **Encouraging improvement in English**

Through reasoning and persuasion, TB provided more socialisation which was directed at making students good learners. She also stressed the importance of English:

- 48     T     Of course English is more important. If you fail Chinese, you still pass, right? ((i.e. sts will be able to go on to the next grade))

She spends much of the lesson motivating students to read more:

- 169   T     So, make sure, next week, just start with one article. Start with one article, then we progress. May be by the second week, you read two articles, right? May be by February, at least you can safely tell me it has become a kind of

174                    habit. And you can read more than two articles. May be one page, two pages. Ok? So that by the end of the year, it has become a kind of habit for you. It is a must- you must read, right? I'm not saying you stop at newspapers, you understand? Because newspapers give you a lot of information, but in terms of language style, your vocabulary and so on, you need to also read story books, right?

TB encouraged students to resolve and work towards getting a good grade for English in the 'O' level examinations:

354        T        Ok – if you want to improve yourself, want to get the distinction or a good mark in Sec. four, start now in Sec one. Don't wait until Sec. four- before 'O' levels then you start reading. Then you have no time. You must start from now – I told you make it a 1996 resolution- that you must start to read as much as you can now. Ok?

In encouraging students to make an effort, she also described student behaviours that teachers like:

141        T        there are some students who are very very creative, they come up with their own design, right? These are the things we like. These are the things that show you really love to read.

Here, TB made her agenda clear. She told students of the kind of behaviour that she (and the system) likes, i.e. the kind of behaviour that the system will reward. This is the kind of behaviour that she will look out for.

## **6.5.Lesson D1**

This lesson takes place on the third day of school, and is two periods long, i.e. twice the length of LB1. In its 70-minute duration, students ask five questions (cf. Table 6.3).

**Table 6.3: Student Questions in Lesson D1**

437	S	rough paper can?
441	S	tcher, write in the diary, can?
456	S	tcher, use 'I'?
458	S	write 'I'?
467	SC2	tcher, how to do?

Student questions confirm and clarify procedure. Like in Class B, Class D students seek information that will enable them to do things correctly. Questions occur in clusters around teacher instructions. The lesson can be divided into four main parts, each centred on an activity. All but the last activity is drawn from the course book. Data description now looks at each of the four lesson parts, and their student questions.

### **6.5.1. Part One: Introductions (lines 12 – 92)**

Working first in pairs, then groups of four, students have to introduce themselves to each other. Performance of this first activity is not smoothly achieved, as TD needs to issue instructions thrice before students are able to understand and do as told:

#### **Task Instructions (First Time)**

- 14      T      let's look at the pictures in the book.  
Can you see Aziz? How does Aziz introduce himself? He: says <My name's Aziz.> and the other guy- John says: <Hi, my name's John, and this is Zi Wei.> Then somebody else says: <Hello, I'm Sumei, and this is: Usha.> Ok? First of all: I'd like you- may be you already know someone- your friend, ok:
- 19      never mind. Just use any of these methods, or even any other creation of yours. May be you don't want to say 'Hi', you want to say 'Hello'. You can say something else but it needs to be acceptable- no bad language.  
How dare you! ((tr directs this to st who is talking at the same time))
- 24      Introduce yourself to your partner. Then very quickly just turn around- you don't have to turn your chairs. Just turn your body around. And then introduce yourself to the person behind you? Ok? Ready? Go! ((most sts don't say anything to their partner. They seem unsure as to what to do, and some whisper to their partners))

TD instructions to use any of these methods, or "even any other creation of yours" (line 19) is too vague for students. She realises that they are lost:

### Task Instructions (Second Time)

- 31 T Introduce yourselves to your friend first. ((seated)) **Next** to you. **Next to you** first and **then** turn around. Next to you first. ((sts still appear unsure. Some speak to their partners before turning around))

When TD asks a student to introduce himself and his group members to the rest of the class, he is unable to, and she realises that students have not done the task as instructed. A third round of instructions follow:

### Task Instructions (Third Time)

- 53 T I told you to introduce both ways ((i.e. the person beside and the person behind))  
Ok- you didn't do your work. I will repeat: I want you all- Ok, I will try once again. First, introduce the person- uh- first ask the person next to you their name. Learn the name. Then, move your body, turn around, and ask- you must know all the other people's name in that group. You must know. Then I can call for anybody to introduce the rest of the group. Do you understand what I'm saying to you?
- 58 SS yes/((some sts nod))
- 63 T ok, sit down and we'll try that again. Ok, everybody, speak to the person next to you. Listen to my instructions. ((sts speak to their partners))  
All right, turn around, turn around. ((sts do as told. There is more confidence with all sts now engaging in the activity))

TD's instructions break down the activity into specific tasks, and are delivered in more basic English. Students now understand what they have to do.

### 6.5.2. Part Two: Favourite animals (lines 93 – 216)

Students have to pick an animal they like from a list provided in the coursebook, and then pair-up with classmates who have selected the same animal. They share first with each other, then with the class, reasons why they like their animal. Students are at first unsure of what have to do, and consequently, the activity begins with several false starts:

### Task Instructions (First Time)

- 101 T ok. All right, first look at the pictures. Pick one that you like-  
LL dolphin/peacock-

106 T don't say anything- just pick one that you like. Don't tell me, ok. Now, this is going to be difficult, because if you are noisy- if you are noisy, the class next door will be disturbed. Ok? Go and find someone who likes the same picture as you do, and sit next to the person. The other person has to get up. ((sts seem lost and look at each other))

TD then supplies more instructions:

#### Task Instructions (Second Time)

108 T Ok, I better do it- this row ((pointing at row F)) has to go first. Go and find someone who likes the same picture. ((row F sts look at the open books on row D's desks. Some row D sts are helping the task along by pointing at the picture of the animal they like. TD sees this))  
 113 Uh-uh, you're not going to change for convenience. Right, come on, go! Go! ((Sts don't move))

Instructions are not delivered systematically or precisely enough, suggesting that TD may not have thought before-hand about how she needs to set students the task.

#### Task Instructions (Third time)

114 T All right, I think I'll make it easier for you. Who likes the dolphin? ((sts raise their hands)) Ok – why don't you get into pairs, pull up your chairs. Ok ((sts move to form pairs))  
 Right, horse. Horse. ((some sts raise their hands. tr senses their hesitation))  
 Right. Ok- hold on. I want everybody to have decided. Have you all decided?  
 119 SS yes  
 T right, horse ((horse-lovers raise their hands))  
 Chick ((sts raise their hands and make pairs))

TD continues to list the animals. Students raise their hands, and locate their partners. Interestingly, only now (line 118) does TD ask students to decide on their animal. Had this been an earlier instruction, there would probably have been fewer problems.

136 T first: you introduce yourself to your new partner, and then take turns to tell them why you have chosen that picture. ((sts begin task)) So, first- listen – first, for example- he ((tr points at one of two boys forming a pair)) will tell him why he has chosen a cat for example. After he has listened to him, **he** will then tell him why **he** has chosen cats. I will then call him to tell us why they like cats, for example. ((sts begin activity as tr circulates, listening to their discussion. She sits at her desk, waiting for them to complete the task))  
 141

By explaining exactly how she wants the task done by referring to a pair of students, TD finally makes task instructions clear.

### **6.5.3. Part Three: Usha and Sumei (lines 217 – 434)**

The third activity requires students to read two texts carefully, so as to identify similarities and differences between them for TD to later list on the board. TD relies on task instructions in the book, and the activity gets underway without problems. The activity is closely guided by the book, and TD checks repeatedly if students are with her.

### **6.5.4. Part Four: Write about a friend (lines 435 – 479)**

Instructions for the last activity of the lesson are as follows:

- 445     T     I want you to say in four lines- write something- guess something about your  
                 friend next to you- don't look at each other's work- and your friend will write  
                 something about you. Ok? Do that and nothing else. If you don't have  
                 anything else ((to write on)), look at your diaries and see if there is space in  
                 your diaries ((sts are passing paper to those who have nothing to write on.  
450             They look around and do not begin writing. They appear lost))

TD goes on to add:

- 451     T     Just write anything about your friend- four to five lines, ok?  
                 ((sts talk with each other as they locate stationary. SB1 leans over to SC1's  
                 desk to clarify task instructions))

TD's reacts to students talking amongst themselves:

- 454     T     You don't need to talk or discuss at this point. Write about your friend next  
                 door. Close your textbooks and put them away.

TD wants students to get on task – telling them to put their textbooks away so they will not be distracted by it. During this activity, all five student questions of the lesson occur.



### 6.5.5. Student Questions in Part Four

- 435 T Do you all have rough books?  
SS yes/no  
Rough paper can?  
T ok, rough paper will do. I want you to write- now, from tomorrow, you bring  
me a book where- it can be a Primary school exercise book that you did not  
440 use- for rough work. Ok? I don't need you to go and buy a new book.  
SS tcher, write in the diary, can?  
T if you want to write in the diary if there's space, then do so.

A student asks if they can do their work on a rough piece of paper, and another if they can write in their school diary. TD agrees to both. Not surprisingly, like their counterparts in Class B, students use Singlish. A short while later, a student asks:

- 456 S tcher, use 'I'?  
T pardon?  
S write 'I'?

The student asks if, in their work, they should refer to their friend using the first person singular pronoun 'I', instead of the third person singular 's/he'. TD's offers a quick reply, before proceeding to classroom management:

- 459 T you write 'I'- you pretend you are him ((their partner for pair work)). Right, I'm going to count to three, and then you must keep quiet. One, two, three, silence. ((sts fall quiet. Some are restless and some begin their work))

Earlier (line 104), TD spoke of not wanting to disturb the class next door. Here, she tells students that they must keep quiet. Whilst they obediently fall quiet, they are still experiencing difficulties with the task:

- 467 SC2 tcher, how to do? ((st asks tr as she walks by))  
T how to do? Imagine you are your friend, and say 'I like' whatever- 'to play soccer'.  
SC2 tcher, cannot ((SC2 can't do the task))  
T try your best  
472 SC2 very hard ((she finds the task very difficult))  
T very hard? Ok just try. ((TD takes a few minutes to explain semi-privately, how the task should be done, and then continues to walk around the class))

TD tells SC2 to try her best, and explains the task to her. I am not sure if other students do not need more explanation too. Also, I wonder if SC2 is unable to do the task because it is

beyond her, of is she is experiencing difficulty because she is unclear of instructions. What is clear however is that TD seems to think it is the former.

#### **6.5.6. Lesson Closure:**

The lesson closes with TD telling students to return their desks and chairs to the original position. She instructs SC1 to clean the board, and SB1 to switch off the fans and lights. When the bell for recess goes, students stand to thank TD. She does not respond as she is watching a student clean the blackboard. Students wait somewhat restlessly, and seem unsure if they *can* leave for recess. They appear uncomfortable, and eventually leave the classroom hesitantly.

#### **6.5.7. Salient Interaction Patterns and Themes in Lesson D1**

In lesson D1, the following were observed as the salient interaction patterns and themes:

- **Unclear task instructions**

The descriptions above show how TD's instructions were often not clear enough, leaving students unclear of what they were being asked to do.

- **Few student questions**

There are several instances, especially during the first two activities when students were uncertain of task instructions, and yet kept quiet. Only in the final part of the lesson, when they had to do a written task did students seek clarification. All five student questions occur in at this point.

- **'Proper behaviour'**

TD's lesson included instances of internal and external socialisation where TD stressed the importance of courtesy, in class and at home:

- 369    T    give me an example of something to show that you have got good manners.  
              Very simple example.  
          SS    don't make noise  
          T    don't make noise when what?  
          SS    when the tr are talking/ don't make noise when the tr is talking

- 374 T yes, good. And when the tr walks in, you stand up and what?  
 SS greet him  
 T yes, good. That's good manners. Then you also have good manners when you are at? Home. When you have your dinner, when you have lunch at the table, you must respect each other.
- 379 T how do you eat your food?  
 SS ((unint)) nicely  
 T eat nicely. Do you burp loudly?  
 SS no  
 T what must you say?
- 384 SS excuse me  
 T and when you yawn, what must you do?  
 SS cover your mouth  
 T so all this shows-  
 S courtesy

TD's class management was consistent with the extract above. When she noticed a student speaking while she was addressing the class, her reaction was quick and firm:

- 25 T How dare you! ((tr directs this to st who is talking at the same time))

At the end of the lesson, she was annoyed when students returned their furniture to the original position noisily.

- 484 T do you think you have done this quietly?  
 SS no  
 T tomorrow, if this happens again, I'll put you back in your pairs ((again and again)) until you can do it quietly.

Her reaction once again was firm and strict, and included a threat to punish students in future.

## 6.6. Lessons B1 and D1: Similarities and Differences

### 6.6.1. Similarities between lessons B1 and D1:

- **Greeting ritual**

Both lessons began at 8.40 am, in the third period. In lesson B1, I arrived before TB and introduced myself to the class. In Class D, I arrived with TD who introduced me to the class. Both classes performed the opening ritual in Singaporean classrooms, where students stand

to wish in unison their teacher (and me) “*Good morning*”. In lesson D1, TD corrected students when they said “*Good morning Mrs (TD)*” – telling them she is Madam (TD). She wrote her name and mine on the blackboard, and re-initiated the greeting ritual by wishing them “*Good morning*” again. The students responded by wishing us individually, before being told by TD to sit.

- **Emphasising proper procedure**

During the lessons, both teachers conveyed to students the message that they expect their lessons to abide by certain rules and structure. In LB1, these are to do with students preparing standardised files to be used as reading files, and speaking one at a time during teacher fronted discussions (after first bidding for floor by raising hand). The latter applies in LD1 as well. TD also stressed the importance of minimising noise: students had to rearrange furniture quietly, and not speak to each other during written work.

- **Shaping good people**

It is also apparent that the teachers see English lessons as involving not just the teaching of language skills. Their lessons incorporated internal and external socialisation (Allwright 1996) as they repeatedly emphasised to students the importance of behaving well in class and at home.

- **Function of student questions**

Student questions in both lessons, in the main, sought confirmation or clarification so that students would be able to execute tasks correctly. Questions occurred in clusters, around episodes of teacher instructions.

### **6.6.2. Differences between lessons B1 and D1**

- **Content of lesson**

TB spent a significant portion of the lesson describing what future lessons would be like, telling students how she expected them to behave, etc. There was no actual language teaching apart from the newspaper article sharing activity. Lesson D1 was, however a proper lesson involving four activities, and beginning on the first page of the course book. Unlike TD, TB spent most of the lesson setting up a structural framework for future lessons. The

lesson was mostly teacher talk, but room was made for student contributions, especially during discussions on the reading file, and personal photographs.

- **Frequency of student questions**

While LB1 is a single period, LD1 is a double period. Yet, in LB1 there were nineteen questions and in LD1 there were only five. The latter is especially intriguing given that there *were* several instances in the lesson when students were unclear about task instructions. They reacted, in the main, by either asking each other or by sitting in silence. One could postulate that they were perhaps not eager to learn. Yet, their general behaviour in the lesson (their attentiveness; the way they seemed keen to co-operate with their teacher) suggested that they were motivated to learn.

As mentioned above, student questions in both classes were about procedure. There does however seem to be a difference in each class's questions. In LD1, when students eventually asked questions in the fourth part of the lesson, these questions sought clarification:

437 S rough paper can?  
441 S tcher, write in the diary, can?  
456 S tcher, use 'I'?  
458 S write 'I'?  
467 SC2 tcher, how to do?

Students questioned so that they could execute the written task. Their questions sought basic information without which students would *not* be able to perform. In LB1, student questions sought to clarify; students wanted to know how they could decorate the covers of their reading files:

276 SF4 =tcher, we just put wrapping paper, can?  
281 S =tcher, can paste things?

However, students used questions to serve other functions too, such as to confirm (information that was already understood):

335 S =can do our own print-out, huh?  
385 S =tcher, must have photograph, huh?

To test how much leeway they had in obeying instructions:

405 SF4 =tcher, don't have one photo, how?  
459 SF4 tcher, if cannot find, how?  
453 S tcher, must be sky blue huh?

To ask TB to buy the files for them:

448 S you order the file for us, can?

And to ask if TB can really tell when a student has cheated in his/her book review:

298 SF4 tcher, how do you know we really read it, or not?

Class B students used questions in a variety of ways. This shows that in these first lessons, student vary in their questioning behaviour, in terms of when they asked (or did not ask) questions, what they used questions for.

- **Nature of teacher instructions**

Because they were generally located in wider episodes of task instructions, student questions drew attention to teacher instructions. TB's instructions were detailed, systematic, included examples, repeated several times, and were often accompanied with written reminders on the blackboard. TB confirmed that students had understood instructions, regularly asking, "*Any questions?*" Students took up the opportunity, and clarified and confirmed task instructions. At the end of the lesson, TB repeated instructions.

In LD1, TD's instructions regarding, for example, how students should for example form pairs for an activity, frequently left students unclear as to what to do. I was myself sometimes at a loss as to how exactly TD wanted students to rearrange themselves or their desks, or if they needed to take their books and stationary with them when they moved places for different activities. This was despite the fact that I was not a Normal Technical student. When, for example in line 435 she negotiated a change in activity, she provided minimal information on how she expected them to do the written task. Procedural instructions were unsystematically delivered, minimal, and without sufficient detail or illustrative examples. For their first written activity of the year, it seemed that students needed more instructions and guidance than they were given. Perhaps it was the seriousness

of the written activity (compared with the three earlier oral activities where students did not seek clarification) provoked students into finally asking questions.

- **Nature of teaching style**

TB's teaching style encouraged student-input through a democratic voting system. Students voted for their preferred type and colour of file, and proposed the date when their files would be ready.

Such teacher-student negotiation was not apparent in LD1 where TD's style concentrated more on keeping students in line and general class-control.

- **Type of punishment threat**

Another difference between the two lessons concerns punishment. Both teachers threatened students with punishment. TB (line 401) told students that if they did not bring a photograph for the next lesson, as punishment, they would be the first to share with the class a newspaper article they have read. TD on the other hand told students that if, in their next lesson, they continued to move their desks noisily, they would have to move their desks repeatedly until they can do so in disciplined silence. In LB1, the punishment called for students to contribute to a class activity, and in Class D, the punishment called for students (not to participate in a learning activity but) to move their furniture.

- **Lesson closure**

The final difference between the two lessons is the way in which they close. LB1 ended with TB reminding students of their homework and of what to bring for the next lesson. When the bell rang, she initiated lesson closure by thanking students, who took their cue and stood to thank first her and then me. In Class D, upon hearing the bell, students stood and looked expectantly at TD. They appeared to be waiting for her to initiate the closing ritual. When she did not respond (as she was watching a student clean the blackboard), they waited awhile before eventually leaving, somewhat hesitantly, for recess. Thus, while both lessons had structured ritual openings, only LB1 ended with a closing ritual. In lesson D1, the lesson tapered off rather than closed.



## 6.7. Summary

This chapter has presented the micro social context of each classroom and an analysis of the first lesson observed in each class. The objective of lesson analysis was two-fold: firstly, to analyse how each teacher managed the lesson in terms of how they set up a framework for future lessons, and secondly, to note features and themes of classroom interaction so as to identify emergent research issues to be used to direct subsequent data analysis. At this point in data analysis, based on first lesson observations, several questions surfaced:

- Would TD's strict classroom management, or TB's detailed task instructions go on, in subsequent lessons, to take more definite form and shape the microculture of each class?
- Would the investment (of time and effort) that TB makes as she sets up a framework for future lessons continue in future lessons? And if they do, what effect would they have on the microculture of the classroom?

These questions drew my attention to other aspects of classroom interaction (to be discussed in Chapter Seven). With the analysis of first lessons, the initial research interest of student-questioning behaviour prompted an interest in the nature and delivery of teacher instructions. In one lesson, I saw a teacher who provided unclear instructions being coupled with learners who did not seek clarification, and in the second, I saw a teacher delivering elaborate and detailed instructions to learners who were surprisingly quick to clarify and confirm instructions. Chapter Seven picks up on these emergent issues and questions (above) and provides more detailed and structured data analysis.



## **Chapter 7. Classroom Microcultures: Illustrating emergent research issues**

### **7.1. Introduction**

Chapter Six discussed the early stages of data analysis which adopted a wide-angled approach to look at each class's first English lesson. Analysis led to emergent research issues which narrowed the focus of the study. These issues centred, in the main, on student questions and teacher instructions: whilst in Class B, clear task instructions were coupled with frequent student questions that confirmed and clarified instructions, in Class D, unclear teacher instructions did not prompt student questions.

This chapter continues data analysis keeping these emergent issues in mind as I turn my attention to the remaining 26 lessons observed. All 28 lessons have been summarised, and all summaries are presented in Appendix H:355. Drawn from audio-recordings and observation notes, these summaries form the primary data for this chapter. I begin by using the summaries to outline the recurring interaction features and themes across all lessons. These features and themes are viewed as important signposts that direct data analysis because by recurring frequently, they are both products and determinants of the class's microculture.

The two outlines sketch a general picture of what happens in each class, and consequently, draw out similarities and differences between the two sets of lessons. These similarities and differences are then used to guide the selection of a series of classroom interaction episodes from the range of lessons observed. These episodes, once identified and transcribed, become data samples, or extracts, to be used in support of descriptive statements and interpretations of classroom observations.

I present and explore the occurrence of interaction features and themes in Class B first. For example, extracts that illustrate teacher instructions in Class B are presented first, followed by extracts that illustrate teacher instructions in Class D. Through such juxtaposition, I hope to illustrate more clearly the similarities and differences in the evolving microcultures across both classes.

Each extract is framed with interpretive commentary that contextualises the extract. Commentaries also develop theoretical discussions that point to the more general significance of the patterns that the extracts are representative of. The chapter presents what I observed in the lessons. It interprets episodes of classroom interaction so as to generate assertions about interaction patterns. The intention is to describe and display classroom episodes rather than to explain them. Explanations are presented in Chapter Eight, which uses descriptions and assertions offered in this chapter to compose collages that portray the microculture of each class. When pieced together, these collages allow for a discussion of the findings of data analysis.

## **7.2. General Outlines**

### ***7.2.1. General Outline of Lessons in Class B***

A significant part of Class B's lessons consists of teacher-talk. Apart from the 'normal' talk pertaining to teaching English, teacher-talk is mostly about classroom procedure, where TB tells students how she expects them to form groups, to execute tasks, to write their comprehension assignment, etc. Her task instructions are clear and thorough, and are often repeated several times. TB also appears to groom her students for academic success in general, and success in learning English in particular. She regularly stresses the importance of English, and encourages students to work at improving their linguistic competence.

Class B students co-operate with their teacher in creating a learning environment. When in doubt, students do not hesitate to clarify or confirm task instructions. Student questions reflect a willingness on their part to do things 'correctly'. Even when instructions are presented and discussed, students go on to seek confirmation, just to be sure.

Students seem more interested in lesson activities when these involve them on a personal level: they participate enthusiastically, requiring little teacher supervision or encouragement. They are as motivated in whole-class discussions as they are when working in groups, and work hard in competitive situations to outshine others.

English seems to be the language most spoken in Class B, although there is some Malay and Mandarin. TB seems to have a relaxed attitude towards class discipline, and a high threshold for noise, as she does not mind the noise that often accompanies group work.

### **7.2.2. General Outline of Lessons in Class D**

Unlike TB, TD does not spend much of lesson time setting up a system of behaviour in Class D. She does, however, often spend a significant portion of lessons reprimanding and/or punishing students for inappropriate behaviour. TD is constant in her attention to strict classroom management, focussing on discipline and control. Students are regularly punished during the lesson, and are sometimes made to stay back after school.

Teacher instructions regarding how students should organise themselves, or carry out tasks are often not specific or clear enough, such that students are frequently unsure of what they have to do. Intriguingly, keen as these students seem to want to learn, they do not always seek clarification when in doubt. Instead, they often guess their way through activities, doing what they think they have to do for the task. This sometimes leads to situations where students are punished or penalised in some way for having got it wrong.

There are instances, especially as the year progresses, when teacher instructions are presented more clearly and systematically. At times, TD even softens in her approach. Although she remains generally a strict disciplinarian, she occasionally displays a more relaxed approach in classroom management.

The students, although not as forthcoming as Class B students with their questions or contributions, are generally keen to co-operate with TD and to learn. This behaviour does not square with them not asking TD for clarification when needed.

Like in Class B, students in this class are more tuned into the lesson when personally involved. However, unlike Class B, they tend to stay on-task only if closely supervised. Whereas English is the dominant language in Class B lessons, Class D students speak mostly Malay.

### **7.2.3. Breaking Down the Classroom Experience**

To be able to compose collages that reflect each class's microculture, the lessons first need to be broken down into recognisable parts. This allows me to describe the different parts and to consider how each part relates to the microculture of the class. To select aspects of the lessons for data analysis to focus on, I looked at emergent issues which were identified in Chapter Six, and at the similarities and differences thrown up in the 28 lesson summaries. The primary issue is the varying student questioning behaviour (located within episodes of teacher instruction) in these classes. As I listened to the lessons and wrote their summaries, I observed how TB and TD varied in their attention to (the installation) of classroom procedure, to the management of order and discipline, and to the delivery of (procedural) instructions. I contemplated the nature of the relationship between these teacher behaviours and student questioning behaviour. This involved repeated rethinking and initial triangulations with interview and questionnaire data, where I searched for confirming and disconfirming evidence of early assertions about patterns of behaviour. Eventually, I arrived at the following three questions which were prompted by the observed student questioning behaviour:

- How does the teacher's installation of classroom procedure shape the general microculture of the class?
- How does the teacher's practice of classroom management, shape the general microculture of the class?
- How does the teacher's delivery of procedural instructions shape the general microculture of the class?

To answer the above questions, classroom observation data is divided into the following components:

- The installation of classroom procedure
- Classroom management
- Teacher instructions

The divisions between these parts of lessons are not always clear, and episodes of classroom interaction sometimes illustrate more than one of these. Student questions can occur in all three, and data analysis is attentive to these questions whenever they occur. The rest of this chapter is divided into three sections, each of which presents extracts that illustrate the above three emergent research issues.

### 7.3. Installing Classroom Procedure

In theory, both students and teacher can, through what they do and how they do it, set up, or influence the systems which the class then uses or practices on an everyday basis. This section limits itself to classroom interaction episodes which involve the *explicit* setting-up of procedure. In both classrooms, there are specific instances when teachers describe how they expect their students to behave. I view these instances as the explicit installation of classroom procedure. These instances frequently occur because it is the beginning of the year, and the teacher is setting a task for the first time. Instances of the teacher outlining classroom procedure are sometimes prompted by students' questions, or by students' behaviour. When students behave in ways deemed inappropriate by the teacher, she steps in.

There are numerous episodes which show TB and TD issuing students with instructions on how to do a group task, or a homework assignment, or corrections etc. These however, will not be included here, only because they will be presented in section 7.5, as examples of teacher instruction. In terms of content, extracts that illustrate teacher instructions in 7.5 generally also display the setting-up of classroom procedure.

Edwards and Mercer (1987) contend that while the teacher orchestrates the lesson as she installs order, what is perceived as orderliness is a set of ground rules which is implicit in the everyday running of the lesson. These ground rules are vital contributory factors to the framework for the execution and interpretation of all that happens in the lesson. When a teacher installs procedure, she installs structure in the classroom. This structure makes it possible for teachers and students to 'do' a lesson together. Erickson (1982) holds that for teachers and students to participate successfully in the lesson, they need knowledge of subject matter information and its logical organisation (Academic Task Structure, or ATS), as well as knowledge of discourse and its social organisation (Social Participation structure, or SPS). This was discussed at length in 2.8.3. In essence, with the use of 'classroom procedure', I encapsulate both ATS and SPS. By looking at the installation of classroom procedure, I also draw on Allwright's (1996) views of the classroom as a site of internal and external socialisation (see 2.10) where the social and pedagogical are in a state of conflict.



All extracts illustrating episodes that involve the installation of classroom procedure are referred to as 'CP'. When they are from Class B, they are referred to as B.CP, (and D.CP when they are from Class D). As several extracts are presented to illustrate each component of classroom lessons, they are listed numerically for easy reference. Thus, D.CP.3 refers to the third extract illustrating the installation of classroom procedure in Class D.

### **7.3.1. Installing Classroom Procedure in Class B**

#### **Extract B.CP.1 (from Lesson B2)**

*"If I say 10 minutes, 10 minutes."*

TB is about to set her students their first group task where they have to share and discuss their personal photographs. She sets a time limit to their task, and lists a class rule regarding time limits:

- T Right. My purpose of asking you people to bring your old photograph- afterwards I will ask you to get into your groups and move your tables. Let me explain first. Listen carefully. Whatever activity I give you, I give you time limits. If I say 10 minutes, ((means)) 10 minutes. Clear? Ok.

#### **Extract B.CP.2 (from Lesson B2)**

*"Bring textbook unless I tell you 'no need', ok?"*

- T uh, ok listen. Wednesday you bring your grammar exercise books. Wednesday.  
S tcher, only that? Only that, huh? ((i.e. do they have to bring only this?))  
T no, plus textbook. If I don't mention textbook, it's understood. Do you  
5 understand? If I don't want, I will say don't need to bring, ok?  
SC6 tcher, Wednesday must bring our grammar exercise book?  
T yes. Wednesday I want you to bring your grammar exercise book, plus textbook, huh. Textbook you must bring everyday unless I tell you no need, ok?

TB's instruction in line 1 prompts a student to seek clarification (line 3) and another student (SC6) to seek confirmation in line 6. TB clarifies her instructions, and states the rule regarding bringing the textbook (lines 4 and 5). She repeats this rule at the end of the extract.

Singaporean schools do not generally have student lockers, so students carry to school only those books that are needed for the day. They try to carry as little weight as possible, so which books to bring for a lesson is usually an important student concern.

### **Extract B.CP.3 (from Lesson B2)**

*“Don’t forget your courtesy, ok?”*

The class is in the middle of a whole-class discussion on childhood past times, and SE4 has just described how, as a child, he used to catch eels in monsoon drains to sell to neighbours. Students react by talking excitedly amongst themselves. TB is re-establishing her control when a student from another class walks into the room, and tells students around him that he is looking for the pencil case he left behind in the previous period. He locates it, picks it up from a desk, and leaves the room without a word. The class has paused to watch him. Some students look bewildered, others laugh. TB has an incredulous look on her face, and says:

T     Don’t forget your courtesy, ok? Don’t forget ‘please’. Don’t just jump into the class like that. Right? Don’t forget your manners.

The behaviour of this student seems odd to both TB and her students - perhaps Class B students would not walk into a classroom without the teacher’s permission. TB nevertheless takes the opportunity to socialise students, by using the incident to remind her students to be courteous.

### **Extract B.CP.4 (from Lesson B5)**

*‘Strategies for Success’ and ‘Class Routines’*

This final extract is particularly long, and is produced in its entirety in Appendix I:371. It displays TB’s constant and thorough attention to ‘proper’ classroom procedure.

The class has just returned from a Physical Education lesson. TB is sitting at her desk, waiting for students as they change out of their P.E. attire. Boys put on their school shirt over their T-shirt and girls do likewise, as well as put on a skirt over their shorts. Students are noisy and full of energy, with some boys teasing each other about their bodies. SD6 is

humming and this, until the class settles down to silence, interferes with the audibility of the recording. Students gradually quieten as they prepare themselves for the lesson. TB waits for silence before asking students for their grammar exercise books.

- 1        T        ok. Before we start, please hand in your grammar books. Row by row. ((sts take out their grammar exercise book))  
                 Row by row, ok. Just the front people collect.

In line 3, TB reminds students of the system for handing in their work. She has described in an earlier lesson how exercise books must be opened to the right page and placed one on top of the other as students pass them down the row to the front student who then takes the bundle of books to the teacher's desk.

- 5        T        ok ((sts are speaking with each other, and TB notices some of them asking their neighbours questions as they rush to complete their homework and submit their bks))  
                 Ok, listen ((sts quieten))  
                 In future, if you are supposed to do homework, remember, homework is homework. Don't come to class, find out from your friend and then start to do.  
10        If you are not sure what you have to do, ask me before you do the work, understand? Not now, when you are about to pass up, then you ask your friends what to do.

TB does not approve of students clarifying instructions for homework with their classmates, and at the last minute.

- 15        T        Right, before I collect- ok. I think I did tell you the other day that I would like you to enter the 'Contents Page' ((sts have at this point put their books on her table))  
                 Each time- right- ok- why don't you take back your books first. Take back all your books. Take back row by row. You collect your books row by row, you pass up also row by row. Easier for me to return. ((front row sts collect bks from TB's desk and pass them back up the row))

In line 13, TB reminds students that they need to record assignment details in the 'Contents Page' of the exercise book. She is unsure if students have done this, and decides to go over it with the class. She tells students to take their books back, again 'row by row'. The 'Contents Page' is a common feature in many Singaporean secondary schools, where exercise books come with a 'Contents Page' printed on the inside of the front and back cover. The page is usually divided into four columns: date, topic, marks, and remarks. It is the student's responsibility to record the date and topic of the assignment before it is submitted to the

teacher. When the teacher returns the book, the student records the marks (if any) the work has been awarded, and the teacher's remarks (if any).

- 20 T Ok. Right. The other day I gave you two pages right. One on 'Strategies for Success' and the other is the 'Class Routines'. Right. Let me just point out, because the other day, I gave you the- the reminders, but I did not have time to explain. ((unint)) I want you people to bear in mind, particularly some routines. I do not want to have to remind you every period. That's what I  
25 photocopied and everybody has a page of it. So that in cases when you are not sure of what to do, please refer back to the 'Class Routines', Ok?

Not only does TB want to fill in the Contents Page with students, she also wants to discuss classroom procedure. She reminds students of two handouts that she distributed in LB3, but did not have time to go over. One is entitled 'Class Routines' and the second 'Strategies for Success' (see Appendix J:397). TB reminds students to refer to these handouts when unsure of class routines or procedure.

- 32 T Right, number 1- <Constant work> Ok. I want you people to keep up with assignments and pay attention in class. Ok? So this is a very useful reminder. That's how you get good marks ((unint)) Every work you do-

TB tells students that they will get good marks if they keep up with assignments and pay attention in class. When (line 32) she notices some students talking, she stops short.

- 35 T Teacher's explaining- you listen. Don't ever talk when the teacher is explaining. Not only you will not understand, it is also very rude. Ok? You people are in Express ((i.e. the Express stream)), you people must be very polite. It's not the Express, right. Politeness is very very important. You don't measure a person according to your certificates, ok. You measure a person  
40 according to your behaviour, your manners. Very important- please behave yourselves, huh.

She firmly tells students to never talk when the teacher is talking, explaining that if they do so, they would not be able to understand what the teacher says. She says that it would also be rude, and refers to the fact that as Express students, they ought to know better. She then expands her argument by explaining that they should be polite not because they are Express stream students but because politeness is "very very important" and a measure of a good person.

- T Right, number 2- <Seek help if you are not sure of anything> Ask the teachers. If you are not sure of anything, feel free. You can see me and ask me to explain. I will explain again, ok. Do not be shy, do not be afraid. We all- we

- 45 will not eat you up or whatever, right? May be- unless you do something wrong, then the teachers will scold you. If you don't do anything wrong why should we scold you? You think that is our favourite past time, is it? Teachers enjoy to scold you, is it? We don't enjoy scolding. Personally, myself- I don't enjoy scolding or nagging at you people- unless you misbehave, right? So if
- 50 you don't want teachers to scold you, you behave yourselves, ok?

TB seems to genuinely want to encourage questions, reassuring students that they should not be shy or feel afraid as teachers do not eat up their students for asking questions. She wants students to feel free to question, not just her, but any of their teachers. She also reassures them that they will not be scolded, unless they misbehave. It is of course up to them to not misbehave. Students listen attentively, and follow the teacher down the page as she reads each item.

- T Number 3- <Be organised> Ya, this is important. Make sure your work is neat. Make sure you've got good- good time management. I think this I have to stress. Last week, I told you that in secondary school, it's important for you to learn how to manage your time. Or else, you will always say "no time, no time, no time". Ok? So learn how to manage your time.
- 55

TB recognises the adjustments that her students need to make to cope with Secondary school life. When given more work at school, students often react by saying they have "*no time*". "*No time*" is today a commonly used expression amongst students in Singapore. TB advises students to learn good time management. Earlier (line 33) she tells students how they can get good marks, and now she talks of the importance of good time management. She seems to be preparing students to be good learners.

- T Right. Number 4- <Dog determination> What's that? Determination here does not mean like a dog, you work like a dog. ((sts laugh)) Anyone can guess? What do you think it means by dog determination? ((sts mutter amongst themselves))
- 60 The explanation here is already quite clear, right? ((TB reads from the handout)) <If at first you don't succeed, try again> That is determination.

TB encourages her students to persevere with their studies, especially when they find an activity or a subject difficult. Again, this advice is about becoming overall good learners. Having completed 'Strategies for Success', TB goes on to 'Class Routines'.

- T Right, I would like to point out what I want- to point out to you regarding class routines. Your 'Class Routines' applies to all our lessons. Ok? Right, let us look at the "Class Routines" number 1- <Write title, date, and topic for every piece of assignment>. ((here, TB is referring to the how students present

80 their actual assignments, not to the 'Contents Page')) Every piece, you have  
the date. The other day we had a meeting. The HOD ((Head of Department for  
English)) reminded us again that each piece of work must have a date because  
books will be checked by the HOD- maybe once a term. The books will be  
85 called in for checking and he is very particular about dates. So every piece of  
work, make sure you have this- write your date, write the topic. Do it as best  
as you can.

After instructing students how they must present their work, TB adds weight to her instructions by telling them that their books will be checked by the HOD who "*is very particular about dates*". The HOD is new to the school, and staff generally know of his impressive teaching record, having recently been HOD (for eight years) at one of Singapore's top secondary schools. By the time of my interviews with TB and TD in early February, the HOD had acquired a reputation amongst staff for being a hard task-master with both teachers and students. Perhaps TB refers to the HOD at this point because she wants to please her new HOD. Perhaps she wants to draw on his authority, so that students will do as instructed.

T In other words, take pride. <Have pride in your work> ((item number 2 on list of 'Class Routines')) When you do your work, do it properly. Make sure it's neat and tidy. Don't just do your work anyhow. You know, last minute, five  
90 minutes before you go to sleep, just scribble here, scribble there. That's not the right attitude. You are in Sec. one. You learn the importance of doing your work with pride, so that at least you can say, "How nice, my book!". Even pasting- right, look at your book, beginning already so neat and tidy ((tr refers to the way sts have pasted the 2 handouts on strategies and routines in their exercise bks)) Even your father comes home, see, "Oh see, my son- my  
95 daughter, very good! See, very nice, very neat! Every page got 'Very good!'" ((i.e. 'Very good' as a remark from the tr)) Isn't it? Makes you feel happy. So take pride in your work.

In seeking to motivate her students to take pride in their written work, TB stresses the importance of working with the right attitude. She tells them that they should not do their homework at the last minute, and that they should take pride in their work and present it neatly.

There is much socialisation going on here. Students are being taught (and reminded) of the nature of work their teacher and education system want. This is the work the system rewards. TB persuades students to make an effort when presenting work by also referring to the pride their fathers will feel when they see their child's efforts to be neat. She establishes a natural link between neat and nice, and between neatly presented work and work that "every page got 'Very good'". The underlying assumption is that neatly presented work is good work.



Also, students please their fathers with their neat work, and this will in turn make students happy. TB's argument is a persuasive one.

What can be extrapolated from this extract is that TB and the educational system value and reward written work that is neatly presented, and that such work, while not a sufficient condition, appears to be a necessary condition for success in school.

- 100 T <Submit homework on time> ((Class Routine number 3)) Ya, today this is a good reminder. Some people, I think one or two, did not pass up ((when sts were told to hand in their books earlier, TB noticed a few of them not doing so)) Ok. 1A- I'm not praising, ok, but 1A the other day, homework, everyone passed up on time. That is a very good start. They are responsible and do their work. 1A must be the best class. Ok?
- 105 SS boo!/no!

TB compares 1B with their rivals 1A – saying that everyone in 1A handed in their work on time. This provokes Class B's competitive spirit. TB fans the fire yet some more by declaring that "1A must be the best class", before asking if students agree with her.

As expected, students are not at all pleased with being second to 1A. They react passionately against TB's declaration in line 105, and a student says that they are responsible too (see Appendix II:371, line 113) Students eventually calm down, and TB closes the episode by saying that both classes must be friends. She returns to 'Class Routines':

- 120 T Right. So have pride in your work, huh? Submit your work on time and if you need extension, sometimes- maybe- I know-. We understand sometimes- maybe you get a lot of work, right? We understand. You got 8 subjects and sometimes teachers give you all the homework same time. Then go home, you got to do Maths, got to do History, got to do Science, got to do English. And
- 125 then you don't have the time. You know sometimes you people got tuition, you got this and you got that. Very hard. Sometimes we understand. As long as you cannot hand it in, see the teacher, tell the teacher, "Very sorry, I cannot get it done". That is it. Then we understand. What we don't like is you just don't pass up. And then you never tell the teacher. And when we count the
- 130 books, we see one short, two short, isn't it? I mean then we will be angry- but at least if you go to the teacher, say "Teacher, we are very sorry, I- I could not get it done because this this this. I will pass it up tomorrow". I will understand. Ok? Clear?
- S tcher, but then tcher will never believe us-

Students are amazed at what TB is saying. Clearly, they have never been informed that they can tell their teacher that they were unable to do their homework because they were too busy doing other homework. When the student (line 134) tells TB that they would never be believed, other students are quick to second this, saying that other teachers would never



understand or allow this. Students are applying what TB is saying about class routines to all lessons including English. TB realises that she must qualify what she has just said.

- T ok- very sorry- I'm not speaking for all, ok? For myself, as I said, at least if you come and tell me, "Teacher, I am very sorry". Just now one of the girls came and told me, "Teacher, I forgot to bring my book". Ok fine. At least- at least I would not shout and say "Why are you like that!" Ok?
- 140 SE4 get this form teacher, very good huh ((st says that it would be very good if TB was their form teacher. Others make similar comments to each other))
- T right, submit homework ok on time
- S tcher, you very good, tcher!
- SF4 tcher, you are the best teacher in the world!
- 145 SS yeh/ya ((sts support SF4's statement.))

TB has won the class's support. By showing them empathy and understanding, she has become in their eyes, "*the best teacher in the world*". Her students warm up to her and want to confide their experiences with another teacher (see Appendix I: Extract B.CP.4, line 147). She politely tells them that she would not mind discussing their Chinese teacher if they had the time, but they do not and must carry on with 'Class Routines'.

- T Right. Corrections- please correct ((unint)) before submission. Which means <Do corrections before you submit your work> ((Class Routine number 4))
- 155 Before you do a piece of work, make sure corrections are all done. Right- some students were asking me whether can use a green pen or whatever, right. Maybe sometimes in Primary school teachers ask you to use green, right? Here cannot. We are not allowed to use green, ok?
- SS uh? ((sts seem surprised))
- 160 S tcher, but our Science teacher ask us to use green
- T Science fine, ok. But Mr-P ((the Principal)) normally tells us, "Do not tell the students to use green", ok?
- SS ((unint. sts are again surprised and discuss amongst themselves, confirming what their Science tr had asked them to do))
- 165 SF4 use normal pen, can what ((st tells the class that it's fine to use their normal pen for corrections))

Some students who used to write assignment corrections in green in primary school are surprised when TB, unlike their Science teacher, says they can no longer do so. Again TB defers to a higher authority (in line 161), to lend weight to her instructions (and perhaps less to the Science teacher's). Notice the student (line 165) who takes TB's side, telling his classmates that it's fine to use a normal (black-inked) pen. This is the same student who (line 144) declared TB the world's best teacher.

170 T ok? Right, finally, <Record assignments>. Huh, this is the part- <Record assignments faithfully> ((this is the last item and the one which prompted TB to discuss 'Class Routines' as sts have to record details of their assignment in their Contents Page before handing in their work)) **Faithfully**. Whatever it is, faithfully- which means every piece of work-. We notice sometimes students need to be reminded. First, beginning January - very good. Every piece of work, you record faithfully. But February- up to fifty percent gone- ((i.e. by February, sts record only half their assignments in the Contents Page))

TB tells students to record the 'Contents Page' consistently, throughout the year.

180 T then by October you become a ((unint.)) never record at all. Then when the HOD comes and checks your books, he say- normally the HOD checks 'Contents Page' first. And then see- "Beautiful! The work only stop until May. Half the year- honeymoon. Relax." ((Sts laugh at TB's comment)) like that we also get into trouble with the HOD. He will ask the teacher, "How come your- your class you only give work half the year?"

In line 180, TB uses "*beautiful*" sarcastically. When the HOD checks students' books in October, he will conclude that they have not done any exercises for the second half of the year as there is no record of them in the Contents Page. If students do not keep their records up to date, then it will look like they have not been working. This will in turn get TB into trouble with the HOD. TB and her students are therefore in the same team, and the HOD is the outside force that has to be pleased.

190 T I know some of them- some of you were asking me what to write for your Contents Page, right? You were given grammar homework, you were given different topics- so you can write on your Contents Page- ok ((tr writes on b/b: " 1. My Timeline 2. Using 'used to' to show comparisons ") Number 1- 'My Timeline' and number 2- 'Using 'used to'.

TB tells students exactly how they have to record details of the present assignment, writing what she says on the board. Students do as told, and SF4 interjects with a comment:

195 SF4 tcher, you ask we all to bring comprehension, you know.  
T yes, yes, we are doing comprehension. Be patient. This is the- ((TB continues to explain how to fill in the details of yesterday's grammar assignment)) yesterday's date, right? Yesterday's date, ok. ((she points to the b/b where she has drawn 2 columns, one for the topic and the other for the date)) So: 11<sup>th</sup> huh? 11<sup>th</sup>. Both the same, 11 (i.e. both topics have the same date)). So settle your Contents Page.

SF4 seems confused as to why they are going through these handouts instead of doing comprehension since students were told to bring their comprehension books for the lesson.

He may be wondering when the planned lesson is going to begin. TB will not be rushed, and tells him to be patient as she continues explaining Contents Page details. She circulates around the class, attending to students individually, checking if students need help. Before beginning the planned comprehension lesson, she reminds students:

210 T Right, just a reminder – although- although I said sometimes I accept explanations and excuses- but please don't make it a habit. Understand?

TB qualifies what she said earlier about excusing students for not doing their homework provided they have a good excuse. She seems somewhat worried that students may take advantage of her understanding. At this point, after students have handed in their grammar books, the lesson for the day begins.

In spending a significant portion of the lesson on the handouts, TB has explained to her students certain fundamental rules that she expects them to abide by. She tells them how she wants them to approach her lessons, and what behaviour she considers appropriate. Indeed, through her explicit installation of classroom procedure, she has laid down a system along which she wants her lessons to operate. Effectively, she attempts to set up the culture of the classroom by proposing this system. Her students can choose to co-operate with her to make this culture happen, or to resist by not behaving according to the rules of the system. By investing her energies and lesson time in going through 'Strategies for Success' and 'Class Routines' in such detail, and consequently altering the planned lesson for the day significantly, TB also displays the high value she places on doing things in the right or 'proper' way.

### ***7.3.2. Installing Classroom Procedure in Class D***

This section displays TD installing classroom procedure in Class D. Unlike TB, TD does not at any point in the sixteen lessons observed, provide students with a list of strategies and routines. As mentioned in 7.2, in her lessons she does not hold the floor at any one time for as long as TB does. TD does not devote a significant proportion of lesson time outlining lesson procedure. She begins teaching the class English in the first lesson observed, whilst TB does so only in lesson two. TD goes directly into the lesson, and as and when the situation arises, tells students what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. In this way, the approach she adopts seems to assume that students come to her lessons already knowing

how to behave, and only when they step out of line does she step in to assert classroom procedure as a corrective measure.

### **Extract D.CP.1 (from Lesson D10)**

*"You want to answer, first put your hand up."*

The class is discussing kinship terms, and TD asks students to list the family members (nuclear and extended) they live with:

- T ok, some of you- besides all these people in the family- ok, some of you besides your mother, father, brother and sister, have others in the family. Those with others in the family, put your hands up. ((about half the class raises hands))
- 5 T Those others in the family, who are they?
- SS grandmother/uncle/auntie
- T you want to answer, first put your hand up ((sts quickly raise their hands. TD signals to SC3))
- ok, you?
- 10 SC3 grandmother
- T no, first stand up. Stand up. ((SC3 stands)) yes?
- SC3 grandmother
- T ok, grandmother. ((writes this on b/b)) Who else? Besides grandmother, who else? ((sts raise hands)) yes?
- 15 SD5 ((st stands)) uncle, auntie
- T ok

TD does not accept the answers proposed by students in line 6, and tells them they have to first bid for the floor by raising their hands. Students are quick to respond with the appropriate behaviour, but when SC3 answers without first standing (line 10), TD corrects him. Students modify their behaviour to give TD what she wants as can be seen with SD5 who first bids for floor and then stands to answer the question. Yet, students do not seem to always remember to raise their hand when they want to answer, or to stand before answering. This is especially so when they are excited about knowing the answer, as the following extract shows.

### Extract D.CP.2 (from Lesson D15)

*"Raise your hand if you think you know the answer."*

- T ((TD reads a passage that is displayed on the OHT about Lily who, having not been invited to a party is feeling sad)) <Her heart sank> it fell to her feet. Was she a happy girl?
- SS no!
- 5 T you tell me why ((tr reveals first question on OHT: <Was Lily invited to Kate's party?>))
- SS no! ((Half the class puts their hand up, eagerly waving arms to catch TD's attention))
- 10 T Don't shout. Raise your hand if you think you know the answer. ((almost all sts now have their hands up))
- You mean the rest don't know the answer? Or are you lazy to put your hands up? ((all sts now have their hands raised))

TD tells the class not to shout, but by getting students to raise their hands, she is controlling noise level, and also checking if all students know the answer to her question (line 11). Students do not want to be called 'lazy', and all hands go up. What comes through is that students are enthusiastic, and do what they are told to. They are willing to co-operate with the rules of the game, but need reminding, especially when their interest and excitement are aroused. One more extract on bidding for floor properly follows.

### Extract D.CP.3 (from Lesson D15)

*"You put up your hands if you want to answer."*

- T from now onwards, you put up your hands if you want to answer. I can't stand to hear so many people speaking at the same time. How do you feel about- this little story about Mr and Mrs Bolt? How do you feel? ((hands go up)) yes? ((TD nods at SF1))
- 5 SF1 ((standing)) I feel sorry, I want to help them
- T ok, he feels sorry for them. Anything else?
- SD3 pity
- T anything else? Yes? Put up your hand. ((SD3 puts up hand))
- T yes? ((to SD3))
- 10 SD3 pity

This differs from the previous two extracts as here TD tells the class *why* she wants them to bid for floor before answering – because she *"can't stand to hear so many people speaking*

at the same time" (line 1). This differs from her more typical style of telling students how she wants them to behave without supplying a rationale for her instructions.

TD ignores SD3's answer (line 7), probably because he has not bid for floor, and has answered without first standing. TD reminds students of the class rule (line 8). SD3 reacts accordingly, and the question-answer ritual is back on track as the lesson continues.

The following two extracts regarding the setting-up of classroom procedure concern participation during group work.

#### **Extract D.CP.4 (from Lesson D4)**

##### *Students who do not contribute during group discussion will be punished*

Students are working in groups, and some members appear to be doing more work than others who are taking notes, etc.

- T I notice some of you are not contributing to your group- I tell you- if I notice anyone not contributing to class work, I may not say anything now, but one day I'll tell these people to do all the learning by themselves. You won't be allowed to learn with the class.

TD has not been explicit about how students must contribute during group work. There seems to be an assumption that they know this already. However, when she sees some students being passive group members, she issues this serious warning, which makes it clear to students how important it is that they participate.

#### **Extract D.CP.5 (from Lesson D4)**

##### *Students who do not work in groups in an organised manner will be punished*

Students have completed their group task, and a representative from each group presents to the class his/her group's efforts. As the last representative presents, TD realises that the student does not have sufficient notes to present with. She interrupts the presentation:

- 1 T this group is very badly organised. Next time, I will keep an eye on your group ((tr looks at the rest of the group seated at the back of the class)). If you don't

do things properly, you will all do it individually and come up here one by one on your own. Do you hear me the other group members?

TD admonishes the group for not having organised themselves well, and the threat of students having to present individually will deter students from being disorganised in future group tasks.

### **Extract D.CP.6 (from Lesson D4)**

*"I expect you to move almost perfectly."*

Students have just been instructed to form groups for the next activity, and TD reminds them to move quietly.

- 1        T        ok, now this is the third time you're getting into groups. I expect you to move almost perfectly. So this side and that side- two rows going to move at one go, and I'm going to watch for the person who is noisy. This side and that side first.

Knowing that their teacher is watching for the noisy person, students move quietly. They do not resist her authority. TD's preference for less noise (particularly when students rearrange furniture to form groups) is consistent with her behaviour in LD1, when she warned students that if they did not return to their places quietly, she would put them back in their pairs - again and again - until they could do so quietly.

TD's proper procedure in the classroom encompasses how she would like students to move quietly, to participate actively (and to be organised in group discussions), to bid for the floor, and having secured the floor, to stand to answer, and to not speak while she is speaking. Generally, she attends to classroom procedure as a corrective measure, when students step out of line. In setting-up systems of expected behaviour, unlike TB, she does not persuade students to abide by rules (so that they will be rewarded by the system), nor does she actively encourage students to learn English, or to become better learners.



## 7.4. Classroom Management: Discipline, Control and Authority

This category of data extracts comprises classroom interaction episodes that show the teacher's management of her class. These episodes are prompted by students behaving inappropriately. It follows therefore that some of the extracts from 7.3.2 depicting TD setting-up procedure are also instances of classroom management.

As an observer of culture in the making, these episodes are of exceptional interest because they show how the violation of rules can cause the breakdown of order. By testing boundaries, instances of inappropriate student behaviour could serve to redefine participant rules, and in doing so they negotiate norms of participation. In 2.7.1, such episodes were referred to as error junctures. Error junctures are of special importance to this study because they help to clarify to students (and to the observer who is attempting to articulate the culture in operation) what is deemed acceptable or appropriate in the classroom. Error junctures give rise to negative sanctions or a range of coping strategies. It would be interesting to see the sanctions and strategies these teachers resort to. How teachers react when students cross the line displays control, discipline and authority in the classroom.

All extracts illustrating classroom management are referred to as CM. When they are from Class B, they are referred to as B.CM, (and D.CM when they are from Class D). As in the previous section, extracts are labelled numerically (e.g. B.CM.1).

### 7.4.1. Classroom Management in Class B

#### Extract B.CM.1 (from Lesson B2)

*"It is very rude to talk while someone is talking."*

A student is telling the class of a newspaper article she has read when TB sees a few students speaking with each other. She waits for the student to finish before commenting on this.

- 1        T     the others, when someone is talking I would not want anyone to talk. Understand? If I hear people talking, you will be the next one, huh? ((i.e. the next person to share an article)) Remember, it is very rude to talk while someone is talking. Ok? Someone is talking- you listen.

TB reminds students of the rule regarding not talking while someone else is talking. She explains that *"it is very rude to talk while someone is talking"* (line 3). To help guarantee that students abide by this rule, TB issues a warning, telling students that if they are caught talking, they will be the next to share a newspaper article.

### Extract B.CM.2 (from Lesson B2)

*To students who do not follow instructions: "I will punish you - one whole week you share your articles."*

Students were told to bring a personal childhood photograph. They have just been instructed to work in pairs, and share photographs and childhood likes and dislikes with each other. As they form pairs, TB walks around the class to check if all students have photographs.

- 5      T      let me find out who is without photograph.  
              Where's your photo? ((tr addresses a st who is without a photograph))  
              S      tcher, can't find  
              T      can't find? And others? Ok- maybe for foreign students it's ok because their  
              albums are back in their country. But the locals? ((the few local sts without a  
              photograph say nothing. Other students are on task, excitedly looking at each  
              other's photos and sharing childhood stories))  
              Right. Don't start the year by this trend. This time- Ok this week I excuse.

TB excuses foreign students who are unlikely to have family albums or photos in Singapore. Many of these students – mostly Indonesians and Malaysians come to be educated in Singapore, and live with guardians. She is not however so flexible with local students, warning the class against starting the year with this trend. She gives them a week to settle into school, and says thereafter they will not be excused.

- 10      T      next week onwards- if you are told to bring something: and you don't bring: I  
              will punish you - one whole week you share your articles.  
              SS      huh?/ah?/what? ((class falls quiet instantly as sts react with surprise to their  
              punishment. Some, engrossed in the activity know they have missed  
              something important, and ask their neighbours what just happened))  
              T      right, anyone who does **not** follow instructions- if you're supposed to bring  
 15      photographs and you do not bring- means: from Monday to Friday, **every aft-  
              every morning** you got to share newspaper articles-  
              SD6      Ai-yoh! ((Singaporean expression meaning 'oh dear!'))  
              T      ok? So unless you have valid reasons- if you are told to do something- please  
              do it, ok? Right, remember uh, please **co-operate**. Ok? Right?

In line 11, students who were not listening to TB are quick to pick up that that something important has just been said, and want to know what it was. They seem surprised at the severity of the punishment – note the exclamatory “*Ai-yoh!*”

In line 14, TB extends this punishment beyond instances where students do not bring things, to include any instance where students do not follow instructions. She does however still make room for valid reasons, and closes the episode by reminding and urging students to co-operate with her and the lesson.

### **Extract B.CM.3 (from Lesson B7)**

*“In future, it’s only polite for you to tell me, rather than for me to go counting.”*

Students have just returned from recess and are chatting, joking and full of energy. When TB walks in, they greet her but return to talking amongst themselves. Many are restless in their seats. TB begins to pace the class in a concerted manner, watching students and checking that the floor is clean of all litter. A few students react by picking pieces of paper off the floor around them. The class quietyens in what appears to be an acknowledgement of the teacher’s authority. The lesson begins with TB referring to students’ comprehension exercise books that she collected the day before. She has realised that not everyone has handed in their books.

- T right huh. Yesterday you people were supposed to hand in your comprehension homework. Right? I think I counted just now- 23 books. Which means we have quite a few book short-
- 5 S tcher, I have it here
- T right. Remember, I told you the other day- what must you do if you don’t do your homework? ((tr refers to lesson B5 and the detailed discussion on ‘Class Routines’ when she told sts to inform her when they have not done their h/k))
- S detention class
- 10 T good idea. Next time I shall do that. I did remind you people right? ((sts speak with each other))
- Right. Listen. In future, it’s only polite for you to tell me, rather than for me to go counting. Ok? Although I said I will accept valid reasons, but don’t make it a habit.

TB is annoyed at having “*to go counting*” (line 11) to discover that she is eight books short. Students should have informed her that they had not done their homework. Her annoyance is

reflected in her response - *"Good idea. Next time I shall do that."* -to the student who suggests that students who do not do their homework should be sent to detention class.

- 15 T Ok. In future- I thought I have given you your 'Class Routines'. If you cannot pass up in time- at least if you don't see me- because I don't have lessons with you on Tuesday- at least inform the monitor so that the monitor can jot down the people who did not hand in. Ok? ((sts nod))  
In that case- where are the books now? All those who did not hand in, now- (sts look for their exercise bks))
- 20 S tcher, comprehension huh? ((st confirms that it is their comprehension bk that TB wants))
- T your homework. Ok?

She continues in her more usual tone, explaining that students should be more polite in future (line 14 - 17). She reminds them of the 'Class Routines' they discussed in lesson SB5, and suggests how they could report to the monitor instead of directly to her. When she asks students (those who have not handed them in yet) for their books, one of them confirms if it's their comprehension book that she wants. She tells him she wants their homework.

TB is patient: she repeats the class routine, and her explanations from lesson B5 as to why it is important to establish this routine. She remains patient until the end of the extract.

The opening sequence of this extract is an interesting reflection of the quiet way in which TB asserts her authority – she gets her students to stop talking, to settle down to the lesson, and to pick litter off the floor without saying a word. This style of classroom management is seen again in the next extract.

### **Extract B.CM.4 (from Lesson B5)**

#### *Staring for silence*

The class is settling down to the first activity of the lesson.

- 1 T Right, our first activity- some people are not listening ((tr stops to stare at sts who are talking. Sts who are paying attention say "shh" and "shut-up" to classmates who are still talking. The class falls silent))  
Right. Our very first activity.

### **'Extract' B.CM.5 (from Lesson B4)**

#### *Not reading during reading period*

This is the first weekly reading period, and as promised, TB has photocopied a story for students to read. It is eleven pages long, and the class spends a substantial amount of time distributing and collecting so that students have eleven sheets each. TB instructs students to read the story before sitting at her desk. While most of the front students settle down to reading fairly quickly, others talk or move around the class to give or take things from friends. Some students share glue as they paste handouts given to them in an earlier lesson into their grammar books. TB does not react to this, nor does she seem to mind students speaking to each other using Malay or Chinese, or even a student briefly bouncing a basketball. Students are obviously not on task, but there are no negative sanctions.

I wonder about the noise level, and realise that the fact that I find it high reveals my personal preference for quieter classrooms. I wonder too if TB may be allowing more noise than she is herself comfortable with because of my presence - because she may prefer to be perceived as being lenient rather than strict. That she does not practice stronger discipline and noise control surprises me, because, based on earlier observations of her strong preference for structure and order, I had expected her to practice tighter discipline.

At one point, the noise level begins to bother some students who tell their classmates to stop talking. All this while, TB is seated at her desk, attending to her work. It is only the fourth lesson, and some students seem comfortable enough doing what they want, instead of what they have been instructed. The class is finally on task, reading the story, only in the last five minutes of the thirty-five minute lesson. The final extract echoes the lenient style of classroom management seen in the previous extract.

### **Extract B.CM.6 (from Lesson B5)**

#### *Students try to control noise-level*

Students are working in groups, and TB moves from group to group, checking if students are on task. She sits at her desk and attends to her work. Before long, the noise level escalates. Some students appear uncomfortable, and speak out.

- SD6 ok, everybody, shut-up! Too loud! Shh! Too noisy to work! ((SD6 is annoyed with the noise. He sits restlessly at the back of the class, and comments several times on the noise level))
- 5 S eh, eh! Shut-up. Concentrate, huh. ((st tells classmates to concentrate on their work. After a few minutes SE4 tries to get the class's attention))
- SE4 excuse me ((st addresses classmates who either do not hear him because of the noise or do and choose to ignore him))
- S attention please ((another st trying, and failing to get his classmates' attention))
- 10 SE4 tcher, so noisy tcher. ((SE4 makes a second attempt to bring noise level down – this time by complaining directly to TB. She says nothing. After several minutes, she begins to walk around the room, and I can hear sts, who having noticed TB, tell their group mates to “Shh!” Class noise level drops))

This extract shows several students agitated with the noise level in the class. They disapprove and tell their classmates to make less noise. They appear motivated to get on with their task, and even complain to the teacher (line 10). However, their attempts to lower the noise level are unsuccessful. TB sits working at her desk. It appears that she has heard her students because she soon circulates the class. In acknowledgement of her authority, students almost immediately lower their voices.

#### **7.4.2. Classroom Management in Class D**

Extracts illustrating the installation of classroom procedure in Class D (7.3.2) also illustrate classroom management because TD seems to tell students how they have to behave only when they do not do as expected. The following extracts focus more specifically on discipline, control, and authority in the classroom.

##### **Extract D.CM.1 (from Lesson D4)**

*“I come here to teach you English. I must only hear English.”*

The class is working in groups. TD hears SC2 and SD2 talking with each other in Malay, and approaches them.

- T both of you stand ((sts do as told, and the rest of the class falls silent))  
Class, why do you think I have asked these 2 to stand?
- SS playing/for playing ((sts guess that their classmates were playing))

- 5 T no, they were not playing  
 S they never help tcher ((the group))/ never talk to the group/ they are fighting-  
 ((TD shakes her head as sts continue to guess what the standing duo were  
 doing wrong))  
 T they were not speaking English. I come here to teach you English. I must only  
 hear English. Otherwise, I'll start speaking to you in my language, and you  
 10 can see whether you understand me.  
 S tcher, your language is what- ((st bravely asks what TD's first language is))  
 T ok, I am here to teach you English. I should only hear English.

TD makes in clear that students must only speak English in class. She says that if they do not, she will speak to them in her language, which they will not understand. When a student (line 11) asks what TD's (first) language is, she ignores the question, and probably does so to maintain a serious disciplinary tone. She then repeats that as she is there to teach them English, she should hear only English being spoken. Students are not offered more of a rationale as to why they have to speak only English. SC2 and SD2 stand as punishment while they work in their groups.

10 minutes later:

*"I caught you, so too bad."*

SC2 and SD2 are told to sit. TD has just left her desk and moves from group to group. Students are on task, contributing with more focus, now that TD is circulating. She hears two students speaking Malay.

- T ((to SC5)) stand up! You were speaking Malay. You ((points at SE3)) stand up  
 as well. This time you will stand for a long time (('this time' meaning now  
 that the 'no speaking Malay or Chinese' rule has been broken once again))  
 5 SE3 tcher, he ((st points at a third st SD3)) speak Malay first ((st complains that  
 had initiated the conversation with him in Malay, suggesting that he was only  
 replying to SD3, and perhaps suggesting as well that SD3 should be punished  
 too))  
 T I caught you, so too bad ((the two sts stand, and continue with their group  
 work. TD walks around the different groups. She sees SE3 bending over his  
 10 desk, supporting himself with his hands))  
 T ((to SE3)) stand straight ((SE3 does as told. Sts speak Malay as soon as TD is  
 out of earshot))

It seems clear that students are uncomfortable with speaking English, and are reluctant to speak it in class, especially at moments when they can get away with it. TD punishes them for breaking this class rule, but the threat of (more) punishment is not an effective deterrent, as students continue to speak Malay. SE3 explains why he was speaking Malay, but TD's



reply (line 8) that he was caught “*so too bad*” leaves little room for reasoning. TD is determined to enforce the class rule and makes sure that students caught speaking Malay must stand, and stand straight.

### **Extract D.CM.2 (from Lesson D8)**

#### *Student punished for speaking Malay*

TD has just walked into class, and as students prepare for her lesson, she approaches SD4.

- T     shut up! Stand up! ((SD4 stands))  
This boy is going to be punished. He’s going have to stand like that for one period. ((I do not know what SD4 has done. He stands, and TD gets the lesson going))

There is no explanation to the class as to why SD4 has been made to stand. As the opening sequence of the lesson, this sets the tone for the rest of the lessons. Students are reminded that TD is strict, and will punish them if they step out of line.

#### **Five minutes later:**

TD has just set students a task. She returns to her desk, looks at SD4 and gestures for him to approach her. He does so, and she tells him to stand beside her desk, facing his classmates as punishment. As he stands, he inspects his fingernails, looks calm, but keeps his eyes downcast.

- T     ((looking at SD4)) tell the class why you’re standing here. ((the class quietens and SD4 smiles sheepishly))  
There always must be something for you to talk. And you must use Malay.  
Just share now. Share with the class what you were talking about. ((SD4 looks  
5     down apologetically, and says nothing. He looks uncomfortable with the  
silence and says sorry to TD))  
T     ok, now go back to your place ((SD4 returns to his seat))

Perhaps TD addresses the class because she realises that students do not know why SD4 has been told to stand. When she asks him to tell the class what he has done wrong, he remains silent, possibly because he feels humiliated. It is rather unusual for a student being punished to have to tell the class his crime. Doing so would be rather bold. In line 5, he does not share

with the class what he was talking about, and instead keeps his eyes on the ground and smiles sheepishly. This is probably the 'right' postural attitude to adopt: to look ashamed for what he has done. Clearly, SD4 is embarrassed. Yet, he seems to know instinctively what to do to get out of the situation and apologises. By doing so, he closes this episode and ends his embarrassment.

### **Extract D.CM.3 (from Lesson D10)**

*"I won't leave you alone until you behave yourself. Go and stand at the back of the class."*

This episode occurs two lessons after the previous episode. The class is in the middle of a discussion about kinship terms, and TD checks if students know the meaning of 'nephew'.

- T     what about 'nephew'? What do you mean by nephew? ((TD spots SF4 with his head on his table, looking as though he is asleep))  
Ok, (SF4) has decided that he wants to sleep.  
(SF4), tell us, what is nephew?
- 5     SF4 ((startled, SF4 immediately stands)) my nephew name uh tcher? ((some sts laugh))
- T     no, I don't want to know your nephew's name. Tell me who is your nephew? ((TD notices SD4 talking, and stares him into silence as she approaches his desk))
- 10     You are not behaving yourself! I won't leave you alone until you behave yourself. Go and stand at the back of the class. ((st does as told, leaning against the back wall))  
Don't lean against anything! If you don't behave, you will have to stand for 2 whole periods. You behave and you can sit down. ((TD returns to front of
- 15     class and addresses SF4 who is still standing, picking up from where she left off))  
All right, who's your nephew?

Once again, SD4 is made to stand – this time at the back of the class, possibly because there he is less of a distraction to his classmates. He was talking to his neighbour when he should have been paying attention to the lesson. He seems familiar with the punishment routine – though it still seems to embarrass him. At no point does he challenge TD's authority. He does not answer back, nor does his body language display defiance. He remains standing for about ten minutes, until TD tells him that he can return to his seat and should remember to behave.

It is clear that for TD, it is important that all her students listen to her and not talk when she is teaching. However, she has punished SD4 (and many other students) before, but this does not seem to get students to stop talking, or to use only English in the classroom. Does speaking while the teacher speaks warrant SD4's punishment? Although TD obviously thinks so, standing at the back of the class, SD4 is probably not benefiting much from the lesson. TD has, from lesson D1 come across as a strict disciplinarian. This continues and is observed in lesson D15 as well.

#### **Extract D.CM.4 (from Lesson D15)**

##### *Student is caught doing Maths homework*

This extract along with the rest in this section, is particularly long and presented in full in Appendix I2: 376. The lesson has just begun, and the class is in semi-darkness as the lights have been turned off to increase OHT visibility. Students are focused on a sentence flashed on the screen as TD teaches them how to read for clues. She asks them questions that require them to read between the lines. Students eagerly answer TD's questions in unison. TD notices that SE5 has his Maths book open and is writing away. She pauses, and the class follows her gaze. SE5 is too engrossed in his work to realise that he has become the centre of attention (see Appendix I2: 376). TD approaches him:

- 15        T     Everyday, you've got to annoy me.  
             Your Maths teacher wants you to do this homework right?  
         SE5   nods ((unlike other sts being reprimanded, SE5 looks at TD somewhat defiantly. She takes his textbook away, and he looks angry))

SE5 has on numerous occasions been in trouble with TD, for not having his textbook, for not making more effort with his homework, for making comments while TD is teaching, etc. He is 2 years older than most of his classmates, and does seem separate from them. In all my lesson observations, he is the only student seen displaying defiance to the teacher. This is especially obvious in the way he now stares boldly at TD as he is being scolded.

- 20        T     Good, you tell your teacher, your book is gone. Who is your Maths teacher?  
         SS   (T-Maths)  
         T     (T-Maths), very good. Better still.

SE5 is in trouble now for it is common knowledge that (T-Maths) is very strict. On numerous occasions while I have stood outside the class waiting for Class D's English lesson, I have heard (T-Maths) scold students for talking, for not having their textbooks with them etc. Needless to say, students fear offending her. SE5 looks worried.

- 22      T      You are forever disturbing my lesson.  
         All right, next. (SE5) will answer this. ((TD uncovers the second question on the OHT: <What would he do next?>  
         SE5    ((remains seated, and does not say anything))  
         T      you're so tired that you cannot stand up? ((SE5 stands))

Because SE5 was doing Maths instead of following the lesson, he has to answer the next OHT-based question. TD uncovers the question (line 23), but SE5 does not do or say anything. He responds to her sarcasm by standing.

- 30      T      huh? What would he do next?  
         SE5    go to sleep ((SE5 says this very loudly. I am surprised that he dares to, as his behaviour is almost confrontational))  
         T      uh, I think I can't hear you- you can shout louder ((TD reacts with sarcasm))  
                What would he do next?

Once again, SE5 does not do what is expected or appropriate. He shouts his answer. His bold behaviour is rare in a Singaporean classroom where students usually try to save face instead of confront their teacher. Reacting sarcastically again (line 33), TD repeats the question, showing SE5 that she has not accepted his answer.

- 35      SE5    ((in a more normal volume)) go to sleep-ah ((the suffix 'ah' in Singaporean English is used to convey obviousness, i.e. the answer is obviously that the boy would go to sleep))  
         T      why do you say that?

SE5 repeats his answer (line 35) but this time without shouting. TD continues to ask him a few more questions, and he continues to supply the correct answers. At the end of the episode, without being told to, he sits, dragging his chair loudly. TD is not pleased with his attitude and tells him so:

- 48      T      You don't show me the angry face, ok. I have the right to show you an angry face, not you.

Error junctures usually threaten the order or flow of the lesson with a breakdown. In this case, SE5 doing his homework does not stop or alter the lesson. It may be distracting to

neighbouring students, but had TD not noticed him, it would probably have made little difference to the lesson.

In line 48, TD senses SE5's anger, possibly because his book has been confiscated. Yet, it is inappropriate for SE5 to display his anger to TD. She reminds him that as his teacher, she has greater power and authority, and therefore, it follows, "*the right*" to show him an angry face.

### **Extract D.CM.5 (from Lesson D6)**

*Students who have not handed in diaries: "You better own up now. If I catch you, your punishment will be double"*

As part of a school-wide project initiated by the HOD, all students must keep diaries for English, in which they have to write (at minimum) weekly entries (see 4.4.3). These diaries are ordinary exercise books with decorated front covers. In some classes, English teachers provide diary entry topics. Teachers read and respond to but do not correct student entries.

TD incorporated diary writing into lesson SD4, where students had to write their first entry. She provided the topic, and strongly emphasised that each entry must be at least twelve lines long. Students were required to hand in their diaries at the end of the lesson. In lesson D5, TD returned three diaries with entries shorter than the stipulated twelve lines. This is the beginning of Lesson D6.

- T     Ok class, where are my diaries? Hand in all remaining diaries to me now ((a few sts place their diaries on her desk. TD looks at the diaries))  
I still don't think I have everyone's diary. Are all diaries in? If not, you better tell me now.
- 5     Stand up those of you whose diaries are not here
- SE5   ((stands)) tcher, I forgot to write
- T     you forgot? No, it is not acceptable. You stay back after school today and finish it. When you give it to me, you can go home.  
Who else?

In wanting to be informed that students have not done their work (line 3), TD is similar to TB. The similarity however ends when TD does not accept SE5's excuse, and tells him to stay back after school (line 7). The four students who stand offer excuses such as forgetting

to write or to complete their entry (see Appendix I2:376). TD reacts to all with the same punishment: they have to complete their entries before they can go home.

- 20 T all you four will stay back and write this afternoon. You don't finish, you don't go home.  
Who else?  
You better own up now. If I catch you, your punishment will be double.  
Monitor ((i.e. SB1)), go and bring all your diaries from my table downstairs.  
SB1 the staff room tcher?  
25 T nods ((monitor leaves for the staff room))  
who else? Don't waste our time. Tell me. ((she writes the names of the four sts who have to stay back after school on the b/b))

Students are generally quiet and attentive, perhaps because of the seriousness of her tone, perhaps because they do not know what to expect next. As a strict disciplinarian, TD's threats employ a certain language:

- 21 T you better own up now. If I catch you, your punishment will be double.  
25 T who else? Don't waste our time. Tell me.

The language here echoes the language of 'police and thief'. TD is catching and punishing students who don't own up and who waste the class's time. When the monitor returns with the pile of student diaries, TD continues her investigation with more policing:

- 35 T ok, let's see how many diaries you have there.  
Everybody stand. When I call your name, you can sit down. ((she reads the name on the cover of each diary. When she has read all diary covers, there are still 5 sts standing. Four have their names on the b/b and are told to sit. The sole st left standing is SA2))  
Come here. You wasted all our time. Did you put your hand up? ((i.e. with the first 4 sts. SA2 shakes his head))  
40 T I told you to tell me. So stubborn! Go and stand at the door. ((st does as told))  
Face the wall - I don't want you to look at your friends. Stay there for 10 minutes. Time yourself. ((SA2 does exactly as told. 10 minutes later he is told to apologise to TD and the class for wasting their time. SA2 looks embarrassed, and with downcast eyes, says "sorry" and returns to his seat))

TD's method of ascertaining if she has all diaries enables her to expose the one student whose diary is not with her. He is scolded for wasting the class's time, and has to stand facing the wall, beside the front door. After this opening sequence, the planned lesson for the day gets underway.

## Extract D.CM.6 from D14

### *Diaries entries shorter than 12 lines*

This next extract again displays TD's strict classroom management. It is the Reading Period, eight lessons after the previous episode and students have now written their second entry. TD has just greeted her students, and walks towards her table on which are a pile of student diaries. She reads the names on four diaries:

- 5           T     These, class, are stubborn people – people who don't understand instructions.  
              People who don't understand English. Sts who are foolish. ((sts are by now  
              quiet, everyone is paying attention))  
              I have said a million times, you must write at least how many lines?  
              LL    12!  
10          T     look at this person, this is:? (SC3). Look at how **lazy** she is ((TD lifts  
              SC3 diary so that the class can see the length of her entry. It is 4 lines long))

TD says the four students whose entries are too short are stubborn, foolish and don't understand English. They are told to stay back after school to write the required twelve lines. She then moves on to students who have not handed in their diary:

- 30          T     Next, we are going to look at all those people who did not hand in their diaries  
              ((she picks up a class list. On it, she has put a tick beside the names of sts who  
              have handed in their diaries. She reads the names of 9 sts who have not given  
              her their diary))  
              I do not have the diaries of the following people. For every piece of work you  
              give me, I will start ticking, and then I will catch those of you who do not give  
              me your work. All these people stand.  
              (SD6)

Nine students have not handed in their diaries, and now have to stand as they carry on with reading their books (Appendix I2: 376). TD has also devised a system with which she can "catch" those students who do not give her their work. Perhaps she feels somewhat insecure and threatened by these students – and so the need to devise systems that will secure her greater control over them.

Interestingly, despite the punishment in Lesson D6 regarding diary submission and diary entry length, students continue to write entries which are too short, and continue to not hand in their diaries. In fact, the number of offending students is higher in this lesson than in Lesson D6 (when five diaries were not submitted). This may suggest that students are not



very keen on diary writing. Or that they find it difficult to do. What is clear though is that TD is not modifying their diary writing behaviour for the better by punishing them.

## 7.5. Teacher Instructions

This section focuses on classroom episodes where teachers issue students with task instructions. These task-centred or procedural instructions provide students with information regarding how they must do homework, corrections, fill in the 'Contents Page', and directions relating to the organisation of classroom activity such as how students have to form pairs or groups. In lessons B1 and D1, it was observed that because student questions in the main sought to clarify or confirm task instructions, they occurred within episodes of teacher instructions. Teacher instructions are consequently of particular importance to data analysis because of the student questions they seem to encourage. Not all of the extracts below contain student questions, and those that do not, have been included because they do not, and /or because they reveal interesting features of teacher instructions.

### 7.5.1. Teacher Instructions in Class B

#### Extract B.TI.1 (from Lesson B2)

*"So you got to match the date and the event, ok? Clear?"*

*Timeline Activity (Listening comprehension exercise on Jennifer)*

TB informs students that they will be doing a listening comprehension exercise next, based on "*a short description by a girl by the name of Jennifer*". Students are told to refer to the 'Listening' activity in Unit One of their texts. TB introduces the concept of the timeline by referring to the diagram in the book which shows a series of red dots marking time intervals. After an extended introduction, TB provides task instructions. Students are required to match each of five events to the year in which the event occurred.

- T Like what we will be listening now- I will read to you- and you **match**. Listen very carefully. There are 5 dates, **5 dates**. You are supposed to listen- I will **read** to you and you will **listen- and you match**. You match the date with the event. For example, if I say '1983'- for yourself- it is the date you were born.

- 5 This is the date, this is the event, ok? ((Tr points to the 'date' and 'event' that she has written on the b/b))  
 So you got to match the date and the event, ok? Clear? I will read- it's a very short article. I will read carefully, you **listen**. Ok? Are you ready? Just look at it first? Look at the- the dates, and look at the 5 events. Look at it first. I will  
 10 read to you, and you will try to match. Ok?

She tells her students thrice that she will read and they will match date with year, before providing them with an example, using 1983, the year they were born. She then tells them twice more that she will read, and they will match:

- T Are you ready? Right. Listen to me first. I will read it twice, ok? First time I do not want to see anyone doing anything. Everybody listen. I will read **twice**. The second reading, then you start figuring it out. How to match. Are you all ready?  
 15 SS yes/((some sts nod))  
 T ok. Right. ((tr reads passage - which students do not have - about Jennifer's life while sts listen attentively))

Here, TB provides more explicit instructions, saying twice that she will be reading the passage twice. After checking if they are ready, she reads the passage and students do as instructed, i.e. listen without doing anything else.

- T Right. I will read again slowly. Now look at the year and look at the events and draw a line to match. Just in pencil, inside your book, ok? ((sts get a  
 20 pencil and TB reads the passage for the second time. When she stops reading at the end, sts check their answers with each other. Tr circulates, checking sts' work, telling them that if they do not have enough room on the page, they can write on the next page. She does not at this point tell them if they have matched event to year correctly))  
 25 ok? Are you ready to listen again? Ok?  
 SS yes/((sts nod. TB reads the passage for the third time, pausing after each sentence to provide sts with clues, helping them complete the timeline correctly))

TB breaks down the task into various levels and presents each level with procedural instructions which are clear and systematic. She provides more explicit instructions along the way when necessary. She is thorough, and repeats her instructions several times. Students are clear as to what they have to do, as can be seen by the absence of student questions clarifying and confirming. She also provides them with clues (see Appendix I3: 380) as they work out the answers.

- 35 T Are you able to figure it out? You want me to read one more time? ((i.e. a fourth time))

SF4 no tcher. We don't need to read one more time ((i.e. sts do not need for TB to read the passage again))

She does not read the passage for the fourth time only because SF4 (line 37) tells that she does not need to. With her clear and systematic instructions, she has made the task more manageable for students.

### **Extract B.Tl.2 (from Lesson B5)**

#### *Instructions for group work (Create a story around ten words)*

As a lead-in to a reading comprehension activity, TB instructs students to work in groups, creating a story of 100 words using the ten words she writes on the blackboard.

- T ok, for your very first piece of group work- listen, I will be writing about 10 words – 10 words on the board. Ok. I will write 10 words on the board- then I want you as a group, to try and figure out from the 10 words- to come up with a simple story.
- 5 SS huh? ((some sts have not understood TB's instructions and others who have explain to their classmates))
- T simple. 100 words from the 10 words. 10 words- come up with a short story-  
S tcher, ghost story?/tcher, can start with our own story?
- 10 T no no no. The story, the story, how it begins and so on, will be based on the words I'm providing, ok?-  
S tcher, must use all uh? ((i.e. must they use all the words provided?))  
T yes, you must use all. Ok? I will write the words on the board. And I will give you about 10 minutes, ok.

TB's instructions are once again clear and systematic. However, before she has the chance to complete instructions, students interrupt her with questions (lines 8 and 11). They seem enthusiastic, wanting to compose a ghost story, and to know the rules of the game, i.e. does their story need to incorporate all the ten words on the blackboard?

She explains how she wants them to form groups:

- 15 T right, I- I will group like this. Your first two rows make two groups huh- in other words, the first 3 and the first 3 go together, and the last and the last go together. Here also 6-6. Here also. ((tr gesticulates as she directs sts. She wants two rows to combine, with the front 3 sts of each row making up a group of 6 and the back 3 sts making another group of 6))
- 20 SF4 tcher, we like that can or not? Like that? ((st points across 3 rows. He wants to make a group that cuts across three rows so that his friends will be together))

- T no no no. This way ((gesticulating with her hands)) Now, **quietly** ((sts rearrange their desks and chairs to form groups, and make a lot of noise as they do so))
- 25 Ok. Now. This is the first time you get into groups but in future, please remember, please get it done very quickly and very very quietly. You understand? ((TB writes the 10 words on the b/b))
- S tcher, no problem

When TB explains how she wants them to form groups, SF4 asks if his group can be formed such that his friends can all be part of the same group. TB is emphatic in her answer (line 21). She is unimpressed with the noise they make as they form groups, and tells them they will have to do better the next time. Like TD, she wants students to form groups quietly. The casual reply of (line 27) reflects the 'can do' atmosphere of the classroom. Students are co-operative, and let the teacher know so. TB proceeds with the final set of instructions:

- T now, I am giving you only 10 minutes. Look at the words on the board. From the words here, could you as a group come up with just a short story? Ok?
- 30 SS tcher can/can ((i.e. sts can do the task))
- S quiet-lah ((st is settling down to task and says this to noisy classmates))
- T right. One person write up, one person present ((i.e. each group must have a writer and a presenter. TB moves from group to group, asking sts if they have selected their group representative. She then sits at her desk and attends to her own work))
- 35

TB repeats that students have ten minutes. Once again, students show their enthusiasm when they say (line 30) that they will be able to do the task. TB circulates among all groups, making sure they are on task, that they have agreed on a presenter, and then retires to her desk.

### **Extract B.Tl.3 (from Lesson B6)**

*Instructions for comprehension homework: "I will write the instructions, for comprehension- because this is your very first piece of work."*

The class has their textbook open as TB sets written comprehension for homework. She tells students what they have and how they have to do it. The sequence opens with her listing on the blackboard the exercise headings, and the question numbers.

- T right, you have to be very careful ok. Right. I want you think carefully, what I want you to do for written work will be questions 1 to 5 for 'B'. Just think

- 5 first. <Reading for Meaning> questions 1 to 5, right. And then you look for the next one under 'A', ok <A. Reading for Detail> Right, I will write down on the board what are the different questions you have to do but for comprehension- ok, I will write the instructions, for comprehension- because this is your very first piece of work, right. ((tr writes on b/b:  
 " Reading for Meaning: Qtns 1 – 5  
 Reading for Detail 1 ")

TB secures the class's attention by telling them repeatedly that they have to be careful. She issues instructions and writes the exercises that have to be done on the board. She says (line 7) that she will *write* the instructions as this is their first piece of work for comprehension.

- 15 T Instructions- you must copy instructions, ok? Right, comprehension- what is the procedure? For comprehension? ((sts are generally paying attention, although a few are talking amongst themselves))  
 Right, everyone please follow, huh. Write down the title. Write the title "Off to Hospital" 'A'. Right, questions- if you have- 'A' you have 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Do not copy questions. Do not copy questions. ((tr writes on b/b:  
 20 " 1. Do not copy questions ")  
 In other words, answer straight away. Number 2, answer in complete sentences ((TB writes on b/b:  
 " 2. Answer in complete sentences ")  
 25 Ok, these are the two things I want you to remember. You need not copy questions, answer straight away. Number 2, your sentences must be in complete sentences. I don't want to see one word, one word. Ok?

In line 14 TB tells students that they have to copy the instructions for the exercise in their books. She elaborates on the procedure for written comprehension, writing two of the main rules on the board. She repeats these. The fact that she repeats these rules a few times, as well as writes them on the board, conveys to the class not just the rules per se, but that it is important that students do as instructed.

- 35 T Ya, another reminder is ((tr writes:  
 " 3. Leave a line after each answer ")  
 Clear? Leave a line after each answer. Ok – what must you do?

TB lists a third rule which again concerns how students should present their answers. Her question "*Ok- what must you do?*" confirms that students have understood, and serves to emphasise her point. However, before the class can provide the expected reply, possibly in chorus, a student interjects with a question:

- SC5 page what tcher? ((SC5 prompts TB to provide the page numbers of the exercises. She responds by writing on the b/b:  
 " Do B Q 1 to 5 (page 10)



- 40           A       Q 1 to 4 (page 11)       ”))  
           T       ok. You look carefully huh- page 10 and page 11. Ok clear? So it’s together 9  
                   questions- all together. How do you do ‘D’? Just quickly turn to the- page 12,  
                   page 12 now.

Interestingly, SC5 has his textbook open and could easily look up the page numbers himself. He is however noting the homework details in his student diary, and because it is normal practice for a teacher to supply the page numbers, TB seems to treat SC5’s question as a reminder and writes the information requested on the board. The episode continues (see Appendix I3: 380) with TB going through a few exercises, and providing example answers that show students how they have to present their homework. She ends instructions as follows:

- 90       T       right, any questions for your work? Whatever you can do now, you do now,  
                   ok? Whatever you cannot, do as home-  
           SF4   =tcher, all do in comprehension book, uh?  
           T       yes, in comprehension book. Start on the first page. Write the title first. ((sts  
                   take out their comprehension exercise bk. They ask each other questions,  
 95           clarifying task instructions))  
           S       tcher, comprehension book, correct huh?  
           T       yes, comprehension book ((sts begin to work))  
                   ok, whatever can be done now, please do now. Read back the passage  
                   properly. ((i.e. read the passage carefully again))  
 100   SF4   tcher, do now uh tcher?  
           T       yes. Whatever can be done now, do now.

SF4 interrupts with his first question (line 92) clarifying if students have to do *all* their homework in their comprehension exercise book. He asks because some of the exercises are vocabulary exercises, and SF4 is probably wondering if these have to be done in the exercise book for grammar and vocabulary. As students settle down to work, they continue to clarify and confirm instructions with each other. Yet another student confirms that their homework has to be done in the comprehension book (line 96). TB patiently repeats her earlier answer. SF4 asks the last question, confirming if they must begin their homework immediately, and TB is once again patient, despite having said this twice already.

TB is particular about how homework has to be presented. Her instructions are precise and thorough, conveying to students that she is clear about what she wants. Students are unafraid of questioning, and frequently interrupt TB to confirm and clarify instructions. TB accepts their questions, and handles them with respect and patience. This seems to encourage more questions.

## Extract B.Tl.4 (from Lesson B7)

### *Instructions for Corrections*

TB has planned to do dictionary work. However, when she returns students their grammar exercise books at the start of the period, the planned lesson is derailed. On receiving their books, students eagerly flip through them to see how they have fared.

- 5        T        Right. Let me explain. Some of you- I have written 'see me'. Ok. And 'seen'.  
                 ((tr writes these on b/b:  
                 " see me  
                 seen                   "))
- 10        Right. I did remind you people about titles. Ok. Every piece of work- you  
                 **must** have a title. And I think the other day we did 2 different piece of work.  
                 One on the timeline and the one on sentences using 'used to'. And I think for  
                 those people who I wrote 'see me' – it's because you did **not** write the title.  
                 Every piece of work, for example using 'used to'- I gave you instructions to  
                 make 5 sentences using 'used to' to show comparison. So you have to copy
- 15        the instructions. Ok? So make the habit of- remember- every piece of work  
                 **must be accompanied by the title**. Clear? I have given you the 'Class  
                 Routine' right? That's not for show you understand? You have a photocopy  
                 each- and you are supposed to refer to it if you are not sure. At the top of it I  
                 have written every piece of work must have a title.

TB explains that she has asked some students to 'see her' because their homework was handed in without an accompanying title. She reminds students that this is unacceptable, referring back to the photocopied handout on 'Class Routines' (discussed at length in LB5) for added emphasis. The handout is not for show, students have to abide by what it lists, The first item on the list is *"Write the title, date and topic for every piece of work"*. Students must make these routines a habit. TB is consistently attentive to procedure, and untiringly reiterates class rules and routines. She is about to comment on another point when she sees SB2's hand raised.

- SB2    what's the- what's the meaning of this? Do we have to write 'S' or 'F'? ((SB2  
                 is unable to decipher what TB has written at the end of her work. Having just  
                 arrived from India, she is unfamiliar with symbols and abbreviations trs in  
                 Singapore use for comments))
- 25        T        sorry?
- SB2    you have written...? ((st points at the tr's comment in her exercise bk. TB  
                 looks at the bk))
- 30        T        'F'. 'F' for 'Fair'. 'Fair good'. Right ((SB2 nods and TB returns to centre-  
                 front position))



- S tcher, so no need to write 'see me', huh? ((the st is filling the 'remarks' column in the contents page. As TB has written 'see me' at the end of his work, he wants to know if he has to write this))
- T ya, for 'see me', put 'see me'
- 35 SS ((unint. Sts are comparing answers, and seeking clarification with each other))

As soon as TB has answered SB2's query, another student asks a question. Students seem keen to abide by what TB wants, and ask questions accordingly. She gives clear instructions as to when corrections have to be done:

- T For those people- if you get a tick in your sentences- in your sentences you get a tick, then it's not necessary for you to do your corrections. Only if you get a cross, ok? Once you get a cross- you have to rewrite-
- SF4 =all huh? ((i.e. the entire 5 sentences))
- 40 T yes. Think of **new** sentences. Ok? For comparison. Right? For comparison.

SF4 is quick to interject with a clarification question – do students have to rewrite all five sentences because they have a cross? TB then moves on to the next exercise - the timeline. She praises some students for their good work, but is clearly not pleased with the fact that others have listed one event per five-year gap in their lives when they could have listed more. She chides them for being lazy:

- T Some of you have very interesting timeline- you have a lot of things included. However- there are some people who only have one event for each five-year gap. Huh. This is generally no effort, huh? Lazy. I am sure in the five-year period there would have been a lot of interesting events that happened to you, right?
- 45 S ((unint. Sts mumble explanations))
- SE4 tcher, the place too small ((SE4 says that they could not write much as there was not enough room on the page))
- T it's up to you to innovate ((unint))
- 50 S tcher I can't remember when we are young ((st was too young))
- T I'm not expecting you to remember every single thing. I did say I'm not expecting you to remember every single thing. But at least there are some special event, right?

This extract is particularly interesting as it displays a real conversation – teacher and students are sharing information, negotiating what they want. Students feel comfortable enough to try and explain why their timeline did not have more events. TB answers both excuses (that there was not enough room on the page, and that students could not remember events which occurred too early in their lives) with patience and understanding. But she goes on to remind students of a 'strategy for success' (LB5):

65 T I said **have pride**. Have pride in your work. Right? Do it properly. I give you time to do it. Do it properly. You understand? Don't 'anyhow can', 'never mind-lah', 'one line enough'. ((TB puts herself in sts' shoes, describing how they may be reassuring themselves that it's ok to work in a slipshod manner, that it does not matter, and that a one-lined answer will be good enough))  
Ok? Put an effort.

She reminds students of 'Class Routine' number two. She wants students to take pride in their work, to make an effort and not hand in slipshod work. She is conveying her expectations of them. They know she expects their best, and that she wants them to work with pride. She is motivating them to push themselves. The final sequence of this extract, is interesting for its frequency and nature of student questions:

T Ok. Right- any questions?  
SS no  
S correction- use the black pen or green pen?  
70 T yes black- don't use green, ok? You're not supposed to use green.  
S tcher, the Science teacher asked to use green  
T who?  
SS Science  
T ok- Science different department

The class has already discussed this at length in LB5, but TB patiently tells students once more to use black and not green, despite what their Science teacher says.

75 S tcher, no need to write the instructions again- just write the-sen-  
T ok- you only use black ((tr ignores previous question)) You just write 'Corrections' so I know it's 'Corrections'- right? Ok? If it's wrong- if it's wrong- you do corrections- don't just do the next work, understand? ((sts continue to confirm and clarify with each other))  
80 Ok?  
S uh teacher, you just write the sentence ((st repeats same question from earlier))  
T yes, yes

In line 75, a student attempts to clarify if they have to rewrite instructions for the exercise, but TB ignores this. He asks it again (line 81), and this time gets an answer. TB reiterates that students have to do corrections before doing their next assignment, and that corrections have to be done in black, showing students that she is firm about her instructions. More student questions follow:

85 S tcher, for the timeline how to do?  
T ok. For the timeline I think no need to do. I want you to correct the sentences, ok?

- SC6 if wrong how to do? ((i.e. if the sentence is marked wrong, how should corrections be done?))
- 90 T do again. Think of another sentence. Ok? If you-  
Listen. Once I tick for you- no need to do- **only if it is a cross.**
- SS yeh!/good!

Questions come fast, and TB answers them all. She repeats herself (line 85 and 90). She does not seem to mind when students shout out questions, as she does not tell them to raise their hand first to secure the floor. Notice too how, in form, student questions are informal and abbreviated. Students' primary concern seems to get answers to their questions, and these questions focus on meaning rather than form. TB rarely corrects the structure of these questions, and in fact replies using a similar restricted and meaning-focused code. In these student question episodes, TB seems to focus on meaning rather than form too. This behaviour serves to invite more questions:

- SE3 tcher, if no tick, if no cross?
- T What you mean- no tick no cross?
- SE3 if nothing? ((TB gave the st's sentence neither a tick nor a cross))
- 95 T let me see your book ((tr checks st's bk and speaks to him privately))
- S if no tick for timeline?
- T no timeline- timeline is different. Ok?
- Ya, timeline no need. It's all there. I want you to correct the sentences. Ok?
- Yes? ((some sts still seem unclear, and 2 sts approach her and ask questions privately. It appears that they want to know if they should write corrections on a new page. Tr directs her answer to their whole class))
- 100 T yes. Yes for corrections- if you have the space on the same page- use the same page- it's ok. Just write 'Corrections'. Just write 'Corrections'. Every time you do corrections please write 'Corrections'. But use black. Ok? Yes?
- 105 ((attends to another private question))
- Right. Timeline no need, ok? Right. Any other questions? Before we proceed-ok- ((SD6 and SF5 take their exercise bks up to TB one after another, to ask if they have done corrections correctly. Tr inspects their bks and nods))
- Any other questions?
- 110 SS no/no

The extract shows the variety of questions that students can ask regarding doing corrections correctly. Their questions and questioning behaviour reflect an eagerness to do it right. It is clear that students have understood the importance TB places on following procedure. It is clear too that they want to please their teacher. This is a class filled with high achieving students who are motivated to excel academically. They are competent and keen to learn, and repeatedly confirm task instructions. They seem to need TB to repeat instructions, perhaps because they need to be reassured that they are doing the right thing, that they are following procedure correctly.

### 7.5.2. Teacher Instructions in Class D

#### Extract D.TI.1 (from Lesson D4)

##### *Instructions for First Diary Entry*

Students have been told to bring an exercise book which they had to decorate at home, to use as their English diary. As the last activity of the lesson, TD tells them to take out their diaries.

- 5 T Ok, take out your diaries. Leave the first page alone. Turn to the next page. Today you must write at least 12 lines. ((tr writes on b/b: "My English Teacher" ))  
Just write whatever I ask- Write whatever you can on this topic. <My English Teacher> Write all you can write.
- S tcher, about you uh tcher?
- T yes
- S tcher, Miss (TD)? ((st seems to be clarifying her title))
- 10 T ((glares at him as she has informed and corrected the class several times on her title)) **Madam** (TD).  
You can write what I look like, how strict I am ((sts talk amongst themselves as they settle down to work. TD sees this))  
You do not need to write with your mouth ((sts quieten, TD circulates and sts organise themselves quickly as she walks around))

With TD pacing the room, the atmosphere is somewhat tense. Despite this being the first time that students write an entry, TD creates no build-up for the diary, nor does she offer explanations or a rationale for diary keeping. Students will have to write an entry a week, for the academic year. Yet, she dives into the first entry, telling them that they have to write at least twelve lines. 'Twelve lines' seem more than a defining characteristic of length of entry. Indeed, 'twelve lines' seem to be the actual purpose for the task. TD suggests that students could write about her appearance and her strictness. She demonstrates this last point once more when (line 13), she reprimands students for talking instead of writing.

- 15 SE3 tcher, want to write date? ((SE3 asks if she would like them to write the date on the top of the entry))
- T of course. If you want me to spell any word, look at your dictionaries first. ((some sts are still not sure of her title and I can hear them whisper "Miss (TD) or Madam (TD)?" amongst themselves. No one asks her directly))

- 20            You can talk about how I speak- whether you can understand me or not. ((TD continues to walk around the room, stopping sometimes to read what sts are writing. After a few minutes, she realises that sts do not know how to spell her name, and writes this on the b/b))
- 25            This is how you spell my name. I have been teaching you for one week, and you still don't know. You must write at least 12 lines. ((sts gradually settle down to work, as tr paces the class))

By answering SE3's question (line 15) with "*of course*", it is likely that TD communicates to the student that he has asked a question with an obvious answer. If so, TD's reply threatens SE3 with 'loss of face', and also serves to dissuade the rest of the class from asking more questions. Interestingly, students ask each other if she is 'Miss' or 'Madam', but none of them seem brave enough to ask her. They remain unsure until she writes her name and title on the board.

She reminds them several times of the stipulated twelve lines, and by pacing the room, she probably encourages students to get on-task faster. They stop chatting, their books are opened, and pen in hand, they adopt the posture of students on-task. Yet, not all students are writing:

- T        I notice some of you are not writing
- S        tcher, no idea
- T        every intelligent student must have ideas about what to write. Don't say you don't have ideas. Why are you not writing?
- 35       SB4    tcher, don't know what to write
- T        you can ta- write about my hair, my nose, my eyes etc., but just keep writing.
- SB4    tcher, but we don't know you ((SB4 has been asking her neighbours questions, and here seems to be speaking for the group))
- T        then just write "I think so and so". You don't know me much yet, so you can
- 40       say "I think my English tr likes whatever". ((the class falls quiet again. TD continues to walk around, comes to me and says, "now they are scared so they are quiet"))

TD's comment (line 31) of some students not writing functions as an opener, inviting students to speak of the trouble they seem to be having with the task. A student immediately says that she does not have any idea of what to write. In response, TD generalises that intelligent students will have ideas about what to write. Perhaps TD says this to motivate students to behave intelligently. She then offers help, telling them that they could write about her facial features. Indeed, as I later discovered when I read their diary entries, most students did describe TD's appearance.

TD wants them to “*just keep writing*” (line 36), but SB4’s comment “*tcher, but we don’t know you*” (line 37) is particularly revealing as it may be the main reason why students are finding the task difficult. She cannot write about her teacher because it is only their fourth lesson, and she does not know her yet. TD offers a solution: students can write what they *think* their teacher likes. SB4 appears to be looking for meaning in the task, while TD seems to be focusing on form (“*Twelve lines!*”)

- 45           T     You can write what you want, I am not going to scold you for what you write. Some of you were asking what I am. I am Punjabi ((she write ‘Punjabi’ on the b/b, and continues to pace the room. She picks up a diary from a st who has completed his entry and takes it to her desk to read))  
                   Those of you who have finished your 12 lines, bring your diaries to me. ((a handful of sts take their diaries to her. The bell goes, and TD tells students that all diaries have to be handed in the following day))

She reassures them that they will not be scolded for what they write, before leaving them to get on with their task. When the bell goes, what is immediately apparent is that the activity has failed. Students did not seem to see the point in writing about the teacher they have recently met. They write twelve lines about how she looks. The activity is a missed learning opportunity, and as an introduction to diary writing, it has failed to generate student enthusiasm for a year-long activity. Interestingly, I do not think that TD came away with the same reading of the lesson. Her comment that “*now they are scared so they are quiet*” left me with the impression that she felt somewhat successful at having scared students into being quiet.

## Extract D.TI.2 (from Lesson D7)

### *Instructions for assignment in workbook*

This short extract, presented fully in Appendix I4: 388, echoes the point made in the previous extract regarding how TD responds to student questions. The class is about to do a few exercises in the workbook, and these are TD’s opening instructions:

- T     ok, everybody, look at page one. This is your first workbook assignment. Write today’s date. What is the date today?  
                   SS    12/12<sup>th</sup>  
                   SD3   how to write date tcher?  
 5            T     oh, he doesn’t know how to write date, even after Primary school ((SE3 shows SD3 how he has written the date in his bk))



Next. You are going to fill up the present tense. Do you know what the present tense is?

TD wants students to write the date in their workbook, and when SD3 asks how it should be written, TD reacts with surprise, and announces to the rest of the class that SD3 does not know how to write the date. She does not answer his question, possibly because SE3 does so first. As different teachers write the date in different ways, SD3's question could actually be a reflection of the fact that he knows several ways of writing the date, and would like to know how TD would like it written. TD's response however, belittles SD3, and discourages more student questions.

### Extract D.TI.3 (from Lesson D8)

*Instructions for contents page, and corrections*

*"I want all corrections to be done properly."*

TD has just returned students their workbooks in which they had to do a few exercises (see previous extract) as an assignment. She distributes blank sheets of 'Contents Page'. Students have to record assignment details on it, and then to correct their assignment mistakes.

- T ok this piece of paper that you have ((referring to 'Contents Page'))- I want it to go in front of your workbook. You have a table of contents for every subject, yes?
- SS yes/ya
- 5 T now- the other exercises that you are going to- ((TD sees some sts starting to correct their mistakes)) Don't do corrections yet- listen to **me**! For the first part- everybody take a black pen- number one. Put down the date of- twelve, one, ninety-six .((TD writes this on b/b. This is the date on which students did their last assignment in their workbook))
- 10 There- ((tr spots some sts talking)) **People!** Ok? ((class quiets))  
All right- if there are no marks- in this case there are no marks- so put a dash. Put a dash. I didn't give you any marks, right? So put a dash.

TD talks the class through filling in the Contents Page. She tells them to use a black-inked pen, and shows them how she wants the date to be written. Her instructions here are more specific than usual.

- 13 ((TD walks around, and notices that a st has mistaken the date she has written at the end of his corrected assignment for his marks))



- 15 T That's not a mark, that's the date. ((she continues to pace the class, observing if sts have recorded details of the assignment in the Contents Page correctly. Having done this, some sts switch to a green pen for corrections))  
 Look- all right. I want you to do your corrections using a pencil and not a green pen. I don't want to see your green pens. I'm going to go over the  
 20 answers. Some of you have done it very well. Some of **you** have used the wrong tense.

The student (line 13) does not clarify if the numbers TD has written at the end of the exercises is the marks received or the date; students do not ask if they can use green-inked pens either. Those who have done this before simply continue to do so now. Until of course TD spots this and tells them to use a pencil instead. This class is by definition composed of students who are linguistically less competent than students in Class B. Yet, the teacher's instructions come thick and fast, and are not repeated as often as they are in Class B. Moreover, unlike students in Class B, these students do not seek confirmation or clarification, and so do not provoke a repetition of instructions. The lesson continues with TD first clarifying the difference between the present and past tense before going through the correct answers together.

- T look at some of your work- you have used the past tense instead of the present. The instructions ask you all for present tense. So- so what? <This is my new classmate. Her name **is** Lily> Write down- write down in pencil the correct  
 25 answer. Number two- <She **is** from Hong Kong> Number three- <In this photograph, Lily and I-> <Lily and I> how many persons?  
 SS two  
 T <**are** at the badminton court>  
 Number four- <This is another photograph of Lily. I: ?>  
 30 SS am

TD tells students to write the correct answer in pencil. Although they are quick to do as told, they do not ask questions. One wonders if they would (dare) ask TD to explain a grammatical point, seeing that they seem to adopt the approach of 'doing and being corrected', instead of 'clarifying then doing'. TD stops (line 37) for a comprehension check, confirming that students are with her:

- T so <Many> is or are?  
 SS are  
 T why is it I cannot say was or were?  
 SF5 present tense  
 35 T the question is asking you for?  
 SS present tense  
 T ok. Is everybody following me?  
 SS yes

40 T are you doing your corrections?  
SS yes

SF5 answers in abbreviated form – i.e. “*Many are*” and not “*Many is*”. When TD asks if students are following her, they reply with the right answer – “yes”. When she asks if they are doing corrections, again they provide the expected correct answer (line 40). The discourse pattern is predictable, and routinised, and echoes the discourse style of a drillmaster leading his platoon with commands. After the class goes through the correct answers for all three exercises, TD draws the activity to a close:

105 T ok. I’m not going to collect any book where there’s no corrections done. ((SB4 and SC4 take their workbooks to TD, possibly to ask about corrections for a listening comprehension exercise sts did earlier. Tr directs her answers to the class))  
You did listening compre a few days before you did this exercise right?  
SS yes  
110 T now what did I say to you? How to do corrections?  
SS pencil/use pencil  
T then? Listening compre- look at the listening compre. I said- I went over the answers and I said to you if you get it wrong, you must what?  
SS circle  
T a number of you did not listen to me. I have to circle for you because you  
115 didn’t circle it. In future I’m not doing that. Ok? I want all corrections to be done properly. Ok, now- close all your books. ((sts close their books))

TD’s goal seems to have been to supply students with the right answer (see Appendix I4: 388), and in this she has probably succeeded. She does not ask if they have questions, or check if they have understood the grammatical points the exercises focus on. SB4 and SD4 (line 105) ask her about corrections for an earlier assignment – TD had to circle the correct answers for students who had not done so. The sequence closes with TD stressing that she wants “*all corrections to be done properly*”. In this case, students must, when their work has been marked incorrect, supply the correct answer by (depending on the exercise) circling, underlining or writing the answer using a pencil, and not a (green-inked) pen. TD, just like TB, is particular about how she wants corrections done. However, while TB specifies what she wants, and repeats it several times, TD says what she wants but does not repeat or exemplify instructions. Her instructions are not as emphatic as TB’s.

## Extract D.TI.4 (from Lesson D14)

### *Instructions for Book Review*

This is the class's third Reading lesson. They have not however, had to have their Reading files ready yet, and have been told to do this by the next Reading lesson. While TB built up student enthusiasm by harnessing their input in deciding on the type and colour of file, and by motivating students to personalise their file with cover decorations, TD has simply requested students to obtain a file to be used as a reading file. In this lesson, TD distributes the Contents Page and two different book review work sheets, all to be stored in the Reading file.

- T     this is the 'Contents Page' for your file. Your Reading file. So, I'm going to give you the first piece of paper that has to go into the file. If you have finished reading ((i.e. a book, over the past few weeks)) you write down the title, the author ((on the Contents Page)) Is that clear?
- 5     SS     yes
- T     some of you- if you have finished, you are supposed to do this book review. ((TD distributes to each st two different review worksheets. Apart from asking for basic information such as title, author etc. of bk, these reviews also require sts to write about plot or character etc.))
- 10     In your review, I can see whether you have cheated or not. Is that clear?
- SS     yes

As TD distributes these review sheets, she could talk about various things that would generate student enthusiasm regarding completing these reviews. However, she says that their reviews will help her discern if they have really read the book. This appears to be the primary purpose of the review: to serve the teacher. I see this as a wasted opportunity because it would probably have made more pedagogical sense for TD to have 'sold' the book review as a fun activity that students get to do after they read a book. Presented thus, the review is a tool to encourage the reading habit. Instructions continue as TD enquires about students who have yet to finish reading a book:

- T     how many of you have not finished reading? Be honest and put up your hand. ((two-thirds of class put their hands up))
- 15     Read one book first. ((i.e. TD does not want sts reading another bk until they complete the first one))
- Read any one book first. You have to finish one book. Even if you have to force yourself, go home and read. You have to finish one book.

TD talks of students having to force themselves to read. There is no discussion of reading for pleasure, or reading for information, or even reading as a means of improving English – all of which could be used to encourage students to read. There is also little mention of how enjoyable doing a book review could be – students get to colour the sheets, give a personal response to a much liked or disliked character etc. Instead, she speaks of force, of students not having a choice – they simply must read so that they can review the book (without cheating). Perhaps TD is aiming to be realistic – they are not competent in English, and so they probably do not enjoy reading English books. As such, by telling them that they have to force themselves through a book, she is perhaps empathising with them, showing that she understands that they may find it difficult to read. Perhaps. However, forcing students to read so that they can write reviews is probably not an effective teaching strategy. The lesson continues, with TD describing the review sheets:

- 20 T ok, here are the instructions. Everyone listen. By tomorrow, everybody must have a file. This sheet ((holding up first review sheet for all to see)) will be your first page. If you have finished reading your first book- which you should by this Friday- write the title down, the author's name, and submit this to me-  
S =tcher, the other one-?  
T =you can colour as well ((still referring to first sheet, TD ignores st's question)). This one ((lifting second sheet)) is written <Main Character>  
25 Don't worry about one main character. You can write- you can choose as many characters as possible- in the book- describe them- ok, you can tell me something about them- whether you like them on the whole- something about their behaviour. Is that clear?  
SS yes ((sts are attentive)  
30 T when you finish it, you can hand this to me **first** before you file it. Is that clear? I am going to mark, and I will know whether you have read the book or not. And when I'm not sure I will call you up to ask you about your book. Ok?  
SS ok

TB repeats that students have to have their files ready by the next day before describing the two reviews. The student question (line 22) goes ignored. Her descriptions and instructions are brief, and minimal. If one-third of the class has finished reading a book, then these students are ready to write a review and would need more elaborate instructions. Students generally listen attentively, however, given their limitations with the language, I suspect that they would probably need closer, finer instructions repeated several times.

This suspicion is validated later in the lesson. Students are either reading or doing their book reviews as TD circulates. She stops to prompt correct and direct students with their writing. Some ask questions that clarify their task. As these review sheets have been designed and drawn up to apply to any book, TD provides individual students with examples of how

reviews can be made relevant to their book. When TD returns to her desk, SB5 approaches her, review sheet in hand. He speaks quietly, but I can make out what he says from what TD says:

- T     how to do the book review? Tell me what you are doing.  
SB5   ((unint))  
T     You don't know what to do?  
SB5   ((shakes his head))  
5     T     ok, everyone look up. Pay attention. I want to tell you how to do your review. Listen- even those who are still reading. Who is the main character in your book? ((TD directs question at SB5 who is still standing by her desk))  
SB5   Pip Parker  
T     ok, Pip Parker. So you will put there Pip Parker ((TD points at blank space on the review))  
10     And then tell me something about him. Discuss his character and tell me whether you like him or not. If the circle is not enough ((i.e. the circle in the review)) you use two circles.  
Now is there only Pip Parker in the story? Anyone else?  
15     SB5   yes  
T     yes, so you write the next person's name. If there is a dog, put there 'dog' and describe the dog. Do you understand now? Do you understand now? ((asking SB5))  
SB5   nods and returns to his seat. ((this is a very quiet st, and given his nature, it does appear a brave gesture on his part to approach TD for help))  
20

It is towards the end of the lesson, and it is SB5's question that eventually prompts TD to tell the class how to do the review (line 5). She provides fuller instructions that include example answers based on a book that SB5 has read. For SB5 at least, if not for some others too, most of the lesson has been inefficiently spent 'sitting in the dark' because of unclear task instructions.

### **Extract D.TI.5 (from Lesson D10)**

#### *Unclear instructions for group work*

This extract is placed as the final extract to wrap up this section with because it reflects accurately and comprehensively, the recurring interaction features of a typical lesson in Class D.

It is 8.40 a.m. and the double-period lesson has just begun. Working on the theme of family, TD has just listed and described, with students, the various members of a nuclear and

extended family in the form of kinship relationships and terminology. SD4 is standing at the back of the class as punishment for speaking in Malay to his neighbour.

As a lead in activity, TD determines, through a show of hands, the number of students who, in their respective families are the eldest, the middle, the youngest and the only child. She puts the figures (of each of these four categories) on the board, and then instructs students to form groups. Students look lost and only form their groups after more elaborate instructions on how they should group up.

TD signals SD4 to approach her at her desk and speaks to him privately, holding him by his arm as she reprimands him for speaking yet again in Malay, that too while she was teaching the class. He does not say anything and instead smiles sheepishly, with eyes downcast. I cannot hear him but he appears to apologise to her, and is told to join his group.

TD then walks among groups, telling some groups to shift away from others that they are too close to. She continues to give her attention to orderly arrangements, directing students to clear the floor of any litter. Students are quick to put litter into the waste paper basket. In the mean time, TD writes the following on the board while students look on with interest:

	Eldest	Middle	Youngest	Only
Advantages				
Disadvantages				

This done, she issues task instructions:

- T     Ok, now I want you to appoint a secretary for your group. Each group must have a secretary-
- SS    =huh? ((sts do not seem to understand 'appoint'))
- T     appoint- uh, get one person from the group to become the secretary. Now, put a rough piece of paper on the table and what you must do- what you must do is- Ok, I want each group to list, uh – to write down in point form, all the advantages you can think of being an eldest child ((she points at what is written on the b/b as she explains)).
- Ok, draw a table like this. Draw a table like this and write the advantages and disadvantages of being an eldest child. Ok. What are the good things of being an eldest child? Ok? What are the good things about being in the middle? And what are the good things of being the youngest child? And then- and then you write – what are the disadvantages- what are the bad points of being the eldest in the family. Ok? Begin now.



Students clarify and confirm task instructions amongst themselves as TD moves from group to group, confirming that all groups have nominated a secretary. When she spots SB5 reading comics she reprimands him, and, as punishment, appoints him secretary of his group.

TD returns to her desk, leaving students to get on with their task. It is now 9 o'clock, 20 minutes into the lesson. Students do not seem on-task, and take some time to secure paper for their table of advantages and disadvantages. Even when they have the paper, some groups have no one taking notes. I can hear a group nearby (all of whom are Malay) speaking at length in Malay.

Within ten minutes, two groups signal that they are having problems with the activity. One complains that their entire group is composed of students who are the youngest child in their family. The group looks uncomfortable and members seem unsure about being able to do the task. A student from the second group says to TD that his group does not have representatives of some categories. These signal that students have not understood, or are unclear about task instructions.

TD is busy working at her desk, and does not respond, perhaps because she has not heard them. After a few minutes, she tells the eleven students who did not bring their photographs for the composition lesson the day before to approach her at her desk. Group work is disrupted as all groups have lost at least one member. As soon as TD's attention is on the students surrounding her desk, the noise level in the class escalates. The eleven students return to their seats but now, few groups seem on task, and the noise level stays high.

A few minutes later, TD intervenes with a punishment:

- T     Ok, everyone stand. I want the whole class to stand because you people are making too much noise. You don't know how to work in groups. Tomorrow onwards, I will make you work alone because it looks like you cannot work quietly in groups. Now you can stand and do your group work.

TD paces the class as students continue the discussion whilst standing. Only when she is reassured that they are on task, does she instruct individual groups to sit, and within six minutes, by 9.18, all students are allowed to sit. TD gives more instructions:

- T     All right, I'll give you another 5 minutes to finish your work. I'll give you until 9.25. I am going to give each group a mark but I am not going to tell you what the mark is. I will use it for your CA marks.



You must write– the secretary must write clearly so I can read. Afterwards I will collect all your papers and give you CA marks.

In her earlier instructions, TD did not mention that groups would have to hand in their papers with their advantages and disadvantages. This is new information. However, even more critical information is that the marks groups receive will be used for students' CA marks. 'CA' refers to 'Continual Assessment' which is a mark composed of special assignments, projects and test marks. This mark is combined with the student's exam mark to determine the final mark that a student receives for the year. Not every assignment is used for CA marks, and consequently, any piece of work that contributes towards the CA mark is usually taken seriously. This information has come 20 minutes into the task. Not surprisingly, students sit up. They seem instantly motivated, and all groups are now on task. At this point, there is another incident, hinting for the third time that students are unsure of task instructions:

- SE1 tcher, nobody in the group is 'only child'. We don't know what to write.  
T if you don't have an only child, then guess. You have to guess.  
3 more minutes to 9.25.

Students have finally, in the last three minutes, been told to guess the advantages and disadvantages of categories that they do not have representatives of. Now, with three minutes left, they are far more focused, and TD senses this.

- T you want more time? Another 5 minutes – is that what you want?  
SS yes!

Students continue to work hard, and as TD circulates from group to group, she spots a group secretary writing the advantages and disadvantages in whole sentences, and says:

- T No need to write long sentences, boy

Her opening instructions did specify that students should write in point form. Perhaps this was not clear enough for students. Perhaps they needed for it to be repeated, or for TD to provide an example of what she meant.

I can hear three groups around me, composed entirely of Malays, discussing their work in Malay. Other groups with non-Malay members seem to speak more English. TD tells the class that their time is up:

T     Ok, all stop. Everyone stop talking. Turn around so everyone faces the front. Everyone turn. Any group caught talking will be punished – I will take some marks off your work. Ok, everyone, stop writing and talking. You had more than enough time. Now, the secretary, write your group members names down on the same paper.

Students hurriedly get their secretary to write the last sentence. The first group is asked to present its work, and a member stands and reads from an exercise book. TD spots a group at the back of the room talking amongst themselves.

T     Ok, group at the back – minus one mark for talking. I will treat you the way you want me to. So you better behave yourself. Could you hear your classmate reading?

SS    no

T     ok, if you don't mind, read again, loudly. ((presenter re-reads groups' points))

TD reduces the CA mark of one group, and all students are instantly quiet. One by one, all groups present their work and then hand their papers to TD. The group presenter situated just in front of me however is unclear about the advantages of being a middle child, and says during her presentation that she *"dislikes being the middle child"*. TD interrupts the presentation to ask why she has written about likes and dislikes. The student and her group members look surprised but say nothing. I can only guess that students wrote about likes and dislikes (regarding being a middle child etc.) because in the previous lesson, sts had to describe their friend's likes and dislikes. TD takes the paper from the presenter saying:

T     you people were not listening to instructions

After all groups have presented, TD closes the activity by providing an example of what she wanted students to do.

T     ok, what are the advantages of being the eldest child? Tell me.

SD3   you get respect from the youngest ((tr fills in the appropriate box on the b/b))

T     this is what I wanted you to do and if you followed instructions, you would have done well. ((lesson continues with tr and sts working together to fill in all the boxes of the table))

At this point some students are restless in their seats, and eventually SE1 asks:

SE1   tcher, then who pass?

T     who passed? I will not tell you. Only one group failed.

- SS    huh?/ which one?/ Tcher, which group?  
T    like I said, I will not tell you. ((sts look disappointed. members of the group seated just in front of me look at each other, and I can hear one of them say "Our group. Must be our group"))  
      Ok, return to your original places, and remember not to make noise with your furniture.

Teacher instructions were not detailed enough in the opening sequence: TD tells students to form groups, but they are unable to respond correctly as they do not know how to group together. Instructions for the main activity of the lesson were not clear enough, and TD has three hints of this when students from various groups, at different points of the lesson, complain that their groups do not have representatives of all categories. Yet, TD does not pick up on students' uncertainty.

They seem to be under the impression that each group has to be composed of members of all four categories (eldest child, middle child etc), and representatives of each category have to work together to collate a list of advantages and disadvantages. Only in the third instance, when a student complains that no one in the group is an only child, does TD tell them to guess the advantages and disadvantages of being an only child. This happens in the last few minutes of group work time. This is also about when TD reminds students to present their work in point form. Although she says this in her opening instructions, she may not have made it clear enough for students to register it.

The most vital instruction - a piece of information that would probably have altered the tone of the lesson by affecting the seriousness and motivation with which students worked - is also one of the last instructions provided by TD. This is that group marks will be used as individual CA mark. As soon as students know this, they dive into the task, and stay focused until the end when they have to be told several times to stop writing. The change in attitude is indeed transparent – and clearly displays that these students care about how they perform, and want to do well. Later, during group presentations, TD warns that any one caught talking will have marks taken away, and this has the effect of silencing students immediately – showing once again that they want to perform well.

It therefore seems unfair that students are only told this important piece of information towards the end of their discussion. They would have undoubtedly tried harder had they known earlier. At the end of the lesson, students want to know how they have fared. However, TD does not reveal the mark that each group has been awarded, telling them only

that all groups except one have passed. She continues to withhold their marks when a few students ask several times for them. One group is given a fail mark for not doing the task as instructed. Rather ironically, this group is composed of students who are generally more competent linguistically than their classmates. They are seated close to me so I regularly hear them speaking – and their spoken English is above the average standard of the class. When they hear TD reveal that one group has failed, they have no doubts it is their group, and I observe that they look visibly upset. They had misunderstood what they were meant to be doing. The group pays the price with a fail mark, yet, the fact that they misunderstood what they were expected to do is the consequence of unclear instructions.

Instructions apart, the lesson sees SD4 being punished, eleven students having to leave their groups at one point to see TD about an unrelated matter (their photographs for an earlier lesson), and the whole class being made to stand during group work because students were too noisy. These were disruptions in the flow of the lesson. It is probable that TD punished SD4 and later the entire class because she wanted to establish order so that students could work. And asking the eleven students to leave their groups so that she can ask them about photographs is a realistic reflection of busy classrooms around the world. Teachers have various agendas to serve, and often have no choice but to do more than one thing at a time. This said, it is also a reality that asking students to do more than one thing at a time, or interrupting them while they do a task, is not an effective teaching strategy.

## **7.6. Summary**

This chapter has presented episodes of classroom interaction centred around three main aspects of everyday lessons. Interpretive commentaries that framed each extract developed a discussion that pointed to the more general significance of the patterns that the extracts were representative of. These commentaries generated assertions about interaction and interaction patterns. It has been my intention to present classroom episodes with minimal explanations so that the reader is able to identify salient features of interaction in each class, and begin to formulate for him/herself explanations as to why teachers and students behaved the way they did. With minimal explanation, I aimed to encourage reader-discovery. It is hoped that the explanations offered in the next chapter will correspond with those already formulated by the reader.

Data analysis entails description and interpretation, but the ultimate goal is explanation. In the main, this chapter has focused on description. Chapter Eight moves analysis towards explanation. It uses the interpretations and assertions offered in this chapter to compose collages that portray the microculture in each class. Once pieced together, these collages will allow for a discussion of explanations.



## Chapter 8. Classroom Microcultures: Assembling and explaining collages

### 8.1. Introduction

Data analysis began with thick description centred on emergent research issues and then worked, using interpretation, towards explanation. Chapter Six identified research issues, and Chapter Seven illustrated them by dividing the classroom experience into constituent parts in which teachers

- explicitly installed classroom procedure
- practised discipline and control
- issued task instructions.

Extracts illustrating each of these aspects of classroom life were presented using interpretive descriptions, and analysis was sensitive to student questions.

This chapter aims to complete data analysis by moving beyond interpretive descriptions to seek explanations of research issues in particular and classroom microcultures in general. To render this task more manageable, the following questions are used to focus explanations:

- How are the microcultures in the two classes similar, and how are they different?
- How do the ways in which teachers install classroom culture, practice classroom management, and deliver procedural instructions shape the microculture of the classroom?

And as a sub-question:

How do the ways in which teachers install classroom culture, practice classroom management, and deliver procedural instructions affect student questioning behaviour?

The chapter begins with the assembly of collages that depict each class's microculture. To explain these microcultures, I draw on interview and questionnaire data to compose teacher and student frames of reference. These frames present the beliefs and attitudes of teachers and students, and are used, in conjunction with theoretical concepts drawn from relevant literature, to understand classroom behaviour and microcultures. Interpretation and explanation of microcultures are proposed using analytical tools such as *dominant patterns*



of interaction, participation structures, participant role relationships, academic task structures and social participation structures. Finally, microcultures are explained from a macrocultural perspective as I consider how classroom interaction relates to larger society.

## **8.2. Assembling Collages that Outline Microcultures**

In Chapter 3.7, I discussed how in this thesis, accounts of what happens in the classroom are not ends in themselves but a viable means towards the “*generally plausible overall picture*” Allwright (1996). The description of the two microcultures that follow aim to be just that: generally plausible overall pictures. These microculture collages are drawn from descriptions and analysis of extracts in Chapter Seven, and from the summaries of all 28 lessons presented in Appendix H:.

### **8.2.1. Class B Collage**

In 6.4.7, the salient interaction patterns and themes of LB1 were summarised as follows:

- TB spent much of the lesson installing ‘proper’ classroom procedure.
- She provided students with detailed task instructions.
- Student questions were frequent and numerous as students sought to confirm and clarify task instructions.
- Teacher-talk sought to mould students into socially responsible people and good learners.
- TB encouraged students to take action to improve their English.

In the subsequent eleven lessons, interaction patterns and themes bore a strong resemblance to those observed in LB1, showing a consistency in the teacher’s and students’ behaviour.

A significant portion (sometimes as much as half) of a lesson was spent on teacher-talk, such that lessons sometimes focussed more on TB setting up norms of behaviour than on actual English Language instruction, see Appendix H:, especially LB1, LB3, LB5, LB7. LB10. Teacher-talk usually installed classroom procedure and socialised students for success. As part of the former, TB consistently channelled her efforts into setting up classroom procedure, explaining handouts on ‘Class Routines’ and ‘Strategies for Success’ in LB3 (see

B.CP.4, discussed at length in Chapter Seven) and reminding students to refer to them whenever their behaviour did not match her expectations:

25           T                           I want you people to bear in mind, particularly some routines. I do not want to have to remind you every period. That's what I photocopied and everybody has a page of it. So that in cases when you are not sure of what to do, please refer back to the 'Class Routines', Ok?

This is repeated in LB5 and LB7 (see Appendix H:355). Her instructions on proper procedure, including task instructions, were systematically delivered, detailed, thorough, and were often repeated several times (see B.TI.1 where TB explains the Timeline Activity and B.TI.3 where she describes exactly how she would like students to do their comprehension homework).

As for 'socialising for success', TB's lessons incorporated advice on how students could become (good) successful students and (good) successful people<sup>14</sup>. She frequently addressed students as 'Express students', thereby reminding them that they were the best in the level (better than 'Normal academic' and 'Normal technical' students):

36       T           You people are in Express ((i.e. the Express stream)), you people must be very polite.

(Extract B.CP.4)

TB told students that they had to lead the way by setting an example for all other students. She stressed the importance of English for success in life, and encouraged them to work on improving their grasp of it:

354    T           Ok – if you want to improve yourself, want to get the distinction or a good mark in Sec. four, start now in Sec one. Don't wait until Sec. four- before '0' levels then you start reading. Then you have no time. You must start from now – I told you make it a 1996 resolution- that you must start to read as much as you can now. Ok?

(Extract from LB1, Chapter Six)

Class B students showed themselves as keen to learn and co-operated with TB in creating an atmosphere conducive to effective learning. There also appears to be a correspondence between the extent to which TB stressed proper procedure (through elaborate task

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<sup>14</sup> 'Good' and 'successful' are used interchangeably in Singapore classrooms and society. They are perceived as one and the same.

instructions), and the numerous questions that students consequently asked as they confirmed and clarified instructions. This is well documented in B.TI.4, where in LB7 students confirm and reconfirm how they have to fill in details on their Contents Page and how they must present their corrections for an earlier assignment:

- 22 SB2 what's the- what's the meaning of this? Do we have to write 'S' or 'F'? ((SB2 is unable to decipher what TB has written at the end of her work. Having just arrived from India, she is unfamiliar with symbols and abbreviations trs in Singapore use for comments))
- 31 S tcher, so no need to write 'see me', huh? ((the st is filling the 'remarks' column in the contents page. As TB has written 'see me' at the end of his work, he wants to know if he has to write this))
- 69 S correction- use the black pen or green pen?
- 75 S tcher, no need to write the instructions again- just write the-sen-
- 81 S uh tcher, you just write the sentence ((st repeats question from earlier))?
- 84 S tcher, for the timeline how to do?
- 99 T Yes? ((some sts still seem unclear, and 2 sts approach her and ask questions privately. It appears that they want to know if they should write corrections on a new page. Tr directs her answer to their whole class))
- T yes. Yes for corrections- if you have the space on the same page- use the same page- it's ok. Just write 'Corrections'. Just write 'Corrections'. Every time you do corrections please write 'Corrections'. But use black. Ok? Yes?  
((SD6 and SF5 take their exercise bks up to TB one after another, to ask if they have done corrections correctly. Tr inspects their bks and nods))

(Extract B.TI.4)

Student questions reflect an eagerness to do it right. It is clear that students have understood the importance TB places on following procedure. It is clear too that they want to please their teacher. This is a class filled with high achieving students who are motivated to excel academically. They are competent and keen to learn, and repeatedly confirm task instructions. They seem to need TB to repeat instructions, possibly because they need reassurance that they are doing the right thing, that they are following procedure correctly. Detailed teacher instructions seemed to provoke numerous student questions. TB on her part sets the stage for questions, and her behaviour is consistent with her words:

- 42 T Right, number 2- <Seek help if you are not sure of anything> Ask the teachers. If you are not sure of anything, feel free. You can see me and ask me to explain. I will explain again, ok. Do not be shy, do not be afraid. We all- we

will not eat you up or whatever, right? May be- unless you do something wrong, then the teachers will scold you. If you don't do anything wrong why should we scold you?

(Extract B.CP.4)

Through active participation with questions and contributions, and through the way TB accepted this, students were able to influence class discussion, thereby negotiating the classroom experience (see LB1, when class discusses details regarding reading files).

With regard to lesson activities, these were mostly textbook-based, incorporating whole-class activities such as reading comprehension, vocabulary explanation, and pair work and group work based activities. Apart from text-based activities, TB established the local lesson tradition of 'newspaper article sharing' as a regular lesson activity, thereby encouraging students to read the daily newspapers, and to share what they had read with the class the following day. Article sharing, often the opening activity of the lesson (see Appendix H:355, LB4), tuned students into the lesson by generating their interest as they often discussed their articles with excitement. Articles brought in by students would subsequently be pinned onto the class 'English' notice board. In this way, students were allowed to influence what the class discussed as well as the class environment in terms of what was displayed on the notice boards.

Students were more tuned into activities when personally involved – when for example, they had to obtain information from their friends, or when activities were based on personal photographs, or when students had to volunteer personal accounts about their untidy bedrooms (see Appendix H:355, LB11). In these instances, they participated enthusiastically, with little teacher supervision or encouragement.

Whether they were in groups or in whole-class mode, students worked enthusiastically and remained task-focused, especially toward the end of the activity, when they were running out of time. When marks were to be awarded, they were especially competitive, and worked harder.

English seemed to be the language most spoken in this class, although there was some Malay and Mandarin. These students were generally well behaved, readily accepting the teacher's authority. She did not come across as a strict teacher, as can be seen from her classroom management. The class noise level often climbed high enough for students themselves to complain that they were unable to concentrate on their work:

- SD6 ok, everybody, shut-up! Too loud! Shh! Too noisy to work! ((SD6 is annoyed with the noise. He sits restlessly at the back of the class, and comments several times on the noise level))
- 5 S eh, eh! Shut-up. Concentrate, huh. ((st tells classmates to concentrate on their work. After a few minutes SE4 tries to get the class's attention))
- SE4 excuse me ((st addresses classmates who either do not hear him because of the noise or do and choose to ignore him))
- S attention please ((another st trying, and failing to get his classmates' attention))
- 10 SE4 tcher, so noisy tcher. ((SE4 makes a second attempt to bring noise level down – this time by complaining directly to TB. She says nothing. After several minutes, she begins to walk around the room, and I can hear sts, who having noticed TB, tell their group mates to “Shh!” Class noise level drops))
- (Extract B.CM.6, from LB5)

See also LB4, LB6 and LB8 in Appendix H:355. Students did not always do their homework (see for example, LB10 in Appendix H:355), nor did they always bring the (right) exercise book to class. They were sometimes off-task during group work, and were on-task only in the last few minutes of the activity. Yet, in the twelve lessons observed, students in Class B were *never* punished. TB seemed to have a high noise-threshold, and, as far as Singaporean teachers are concerned, a more relaxed attitude towards class discipline. When she wanted her students to quieten, she would stand at centre-front of class and stare at them without saying a word. Sensitive to contextualisation cues and conventions, especially as she frequently used body language for class management, students would quickly fall silent:

- 1 T Right, our first activity- some people are not listening ((tr stops to stare at sts who are talking. Sts who are paying attention say “shh” and “shut-up” to classmates who are still talking. The class falls silent))
- (Extract B.CM.4, from LB5)

### **8.2.2. Class D Collage**

In 6.5.7, the salient interaction patterns and themes of LD1 were summarised as follows:

- TD's instructions were often not clear enough for students.
- Students asked few questions, even when task clarification was lacking.
- Although TD did not discuss or explicitly set up classroom procedure, her strict classroom management suggested that proper behaviour and procedure were important to her.

The subsequent fifteen lessons bore a marked resemblance to LD1. Teacher instructions were frequently unclear, leaving students unsure of what they ought to be doing - see

7.5.2:218 when TD's instructions for diary entry (D.TI.1), for assignment in workbook (D.TI.2), for Contents Page and corrections (D.TI.3), for book review (D.TI.4), and for group work (D.TI.5) were all lacking in clarity. At such times, students either sat silently, or sought clarification from their peers.

In Class D there was less teacher-talk. TD seemed to approach her lessons in a somewhat uniform fashion, based, on the '*first discipline, then teach*' maxim. Upon entering the room, she would firmly establish her authority by reprimanding or/and punishing students for not having their books on their desks, for not generally being ready for their lesson; or for speaking, speaking too loudly, speaking Malay, Mandarin, or any other language but English; or for not having done their homework, etc. (see D.CM.2, D.CM.4, D.CM.5, D.CM.6 where these are described and discussed at length, and see also lesson summaries of LD3, LD5, LD6, LD11, LD12, LD13, LD15, LD16 in Appendix H:355). As punishment, students were often made to stand at their seats, or at the front of the class, or at the front doorway of the classroom. TD would note the names of offending students in a special notebook. Names that had been noted more than thrice would be sent to the Discipline Master. Only after establishing her authority, TD would begin the day's lesson.

Lessons were generally drawn from the textbook and dealt with in the sequence suggested by the book. Activities would include typical whole-class tasks such as reading comprehension, vocabulary explanation, as well as pair and group based activities where students carried out exercises according to explicit cues provided in the book.

TD tended to prefer controlled activities such as pattern practice over group work (see for example LD1 – discussed in Chapter Six), and D.TI.3 in Chapter Seven). In such activities, TD nominated students, imposed constraints on the kinds of answers required, controlled turn allocation, and determined duration and direction of talk. Rarely would exchange of information *not* be previously supplied in the text, and rarely would exchanges involve open-ended questions that generated a sharing of views and opinions.

Lesson-talk therefore usually involved example dialogues from the text, grammatical explanations, and confirmations that students understood grammatical points. The class would do the text-based exercises orally, usually through a quick series of question-answer sessions. In such episodes, teacher instructions, as well as general grammatical explanations would be clearly and systematically delivered. Students seemed familiar and at ease with the



routines of pattern practice and question-answer sessions, and these episodes would flow smoothly. This point is particularly well illustrated in D.TI.3 (presented in full in Appendix I:371):

- T <are at the badminton court>  
 Number four- <This is another photograph of Lily. I: ?>  
 30 SS am  
 T so <Many> is or are?  
 SS are  
 T why is it I cannot say was or were?  
 SF5 present tense  
 35 T the question is asking you for?  
 SS present tense  
 T ok. Is everybody following me?  
 SS yes  
 T are you doing your corrections?  
 40 SS yes

(Extract D.TI.3 from LD8)

However, outside such routinised patterns, students frequently had problems understanding TD's procedural instructions. When students were directed to, for example, form groups, or co-ordinate within groups as to who did what, they were often at a loss as to what to do (see LD1 and LD10). In LD4, (see D.TI.1), students are having difficulty composing their first diary entry. They do not voice this, and only when TD paces the classroom is the matter addressed:

- T I notice some of you are not writing  
 S tcher, no idea  
 T every intelligent student must have ideas about what to write. Don't say you don't have ideas. Why are you not writing?  
 35 SB4 tcher, don't know what to write  
 T you can ta- write about my hair, my nose, my eyes etc., but just keep writing.  
 SB4 tcher, but we don't know you ((SB4 has been asking her neighbours questions, and here seems to be speaking for the group))

(Extract D.TI.1 from LD4)

There would be confusion because they had not understood instructions. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, students would not seek clarification with TD, and would instead guess what they had to do, or would clarify amongst themselves. Consequently, they at times discovered, even if only much later in the lesson, that they had not done as instructed (see in particular D.TI.4 from LD14).

Students, though not as forthcoming in questions and contributions as Class B students were generally keen to learn (see LD8 where students were, when their grammar exercise books were returned, eager to know how had they fared, and why their answers had been marked



wrong; see also Appendix H:, LD13 where students were motivated, tuned-in and confident during a listening comprehension lesson, and LD15 where TD's close guidance of five lesson activities engineered a smooth-flowing lesson with students volunteering contributions with confidence).

Students co-operated with TD, accepting the norms she imposed, and generally conformed to class rules instead of attempting to establish a counter culture. They did not seem to resent or resist TD's strictness, despite the fact that through her regular policing of students, she often behaved as though they were aiming to oppose her will (see D.CM.1-6). Only one student displayed defiant and non-conformative behaviour (see D.CM.4). He was not, however, the norm, and certainly not part of mainstream class culture: he was not generally liked or supported by his classmates - not even by those who were regularly punished for breaking class rules. That Class D students seemed eager to learn does not square with the fact that they did not clarify task instructions, especially in instances when clarification was lacking.

Students responded differently to different methodology. As was the case with Class B, Class D students seemed more tuned into lesson activities when personally involved (see LD9 and LD10). They were motivated when tasks required them to obtain information from their partner for pair work, or when they had to work with personal photographs. However, unlike in Class B, Class D students seemed to be more on-task when closely supervised (e.g. in LD10). They seemed to thrive when systematically led through an activity or exercise, and when their tasks were clearly structured, incorporating familiar routines of language learning exercises and activities (see D.TI.3 from LD8). Consequently, group work as a methodology did not seem to work well with these students. During group activities, students were often off-task, sitting on the periphery of the group, unable to pull the group together, nor to drive themselves towards achieving their task. Generally, students seemed unable to organise the group, and this led to one or two members having to do most of the work (see LD2 and LD3).

Whereas English was the dominant language amongst students in Class B, Class D students would speak mostly Malay, unless the teacher was listening in, or could listen in, or when students were working in groups with non-Malay members. Communication in this classroom was invariably problematic because students (many of whom were incapable of fluent conversation in English) were coupled with a teacher (and an education system) who not only forbids the use of Malay during lesson time, but also punishes students who linguistically trespass beyond English:

- T both of you stand ((sts do as told, and the rest of the class falls silent))  
Class, why do you think I have asked these 2 to stand?
- SS playing/for playing ((sts guess that their classmates were playing))
- T no, they were not playing
- T they were not speaking English. I come here to teach you English. I must only hear English. Otherwise, I'll start speaking to you in my language, and you can see whether you understand me.
- T ((to SC5)) stand up! You were speaking Malay. You ((points at SE3)) stand up as well. This time you will stand for a long time (('this time' meaning now that the 'no speaking Malay or Chinese' rule has been broken once again))  
(D.CM.1 from LD4)
- T shut up! Stand up! ((SD4 stands))  
This boy is going to be punished. He's going have to stand like that for one period.
- Five minutes later:
- T ((looking at SD4)) tell the class why you're standing here. ((the class quietens and SD4 smiles sheepishly))  
There always must be something for you to talk. And you must use Malay.  
(Extract D.CM.2 from LD8)

### **8.2.3. Similarities and Differences in Teacher and Student Behaviours**

The teachers and students in these classrooms behaved in ways that are similar and different. Looking firstly at the teachers, one similarity is that both emphasised procedure. They wanted their students to behave appropriately, and this behaviour included, for example, handing in work in an orderly manner, rearranging class furniture quietly for pair/group work, recording assignment details in the 'Contents Page', and doing assignment corrections in specific ways.

Although both teachers stressed proper procedure, they differed in the amount of lesson time and personal effort they spent on specifying and setting up classroom procedure. TB was thorough and consistent in the way she outlined how she wanted students to carry out tasks. It seemed that, whilst TD wanted students to follow 'proper' procedure, she did not provide clear enough task instructions. This difference in teacher behaviour is seen in their delivery of procedural instructions. TB's instructions were clearly presented using language which her students could understand; they were systematically presented in a logical sequential manner, and repeated several times. TD's instructions, on the other hand, were brief,

minimal, and often delivered in a language and at a pace beyond the grasp of her students. Her instructions did not specify or display (with examples), nor were they usually repeated.

Another difference between the two teachers is their attention to classroom management. TB generally reacted to a violation of a rule by reminding the class of the rule and then (re)explaining why students had to abide by it. TD, on the other hand, frequently spent a significant portion of the lesson reprimanding and punishing students.

Students of both classes were keen to learn. They were competitive, caring about performing well, and about out-performing their classmates. They generally did not wilfully disobey their teacher, and were quick to adopt the necessary behaviour (e.g. they fell silent and listened when told, co-ordinating with the teacher to encourage smooth lesson-flow). Both students displayed a greater motivation for work when the task involved them personally, and when grades or marks were at stake.

A difference in student behaviour is that whilst Class B students did not hesitate to clarify and confirm task instructions with TB, Class D students did, even when uncertain of task instructions. This is consistent with what was observed in lessons B1 and D1. Class B students' guiding motto seems to be *"First ask, then do"*, and Class D's is *"First do, then get corrected"*. This difference in student behaviour is particularly significant because of the repercussions that students not seeking clarification has on learning.

### 8.3. Seeking Explanations through Frames of References

TB's and TD's use of language to control classroom interaction affects how students participate in lessons. The ways in which teachers organise their classroom reflect who they are, what they know and believe, and their perceptions about education, teaching, teachers, students, and the second language classroom. TD's use of structured learning tasks to present a particular grammatical rule; or discipline to deter students from speaking Malay during lessons reveal information about how she views herself, her students, and what she considers to be effective ways to teach. TB's willingness to allow students to contribute to class discussions, and her high tolerance for noise during group work suggest something about how she sees herself as a teacher, how she views her students, and what she considers to be appropriate language learning behaviour.

A large extent of what happens in Class B and Class D occurs through the use of interactional strategies which arise from participants' frames of references. Teachers and students interpret their own and each other's communicative behaviour through individual frames of references. To better understand classroom observations - why teachers and students in Class B and Class D speak and act the way they do as they co-construct the microculture of their class, this section explores their frames of reference. In doing this, I incorporate the interpretive concepts of 'multiple realities' and 'plurality of voices' (Chouliaraki, 1997, see 3.9.1). The discussion first looks at each teacher's frame of reference, then at each set of students' frame of references to help explain classroom observations.

### **8.3.1. Teachers's Frames of References**

An English teacher's frame of reference encompasses the range of prior experiences as student and learner, the nature of training and professional knowledge, theoretical beliefs about English language learning and teaching, and how s/he make sense of his/her own teaching experiences. Prior experiences as student and learner, accumulated over years of observing teachers teach, create images of how teaching should occur. Such 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie 1975) often leads teachers to teach the ways they were taught.

Another important aspect of a teacher's frame of reference are theoretical beliefs which are the philosophical principles or belief systems that influence teacher expectations and steer decision making. These beliefs act as filters through which teachers make instructional judgements and decisions. However, beliefs do not necessarily translate into action as at times, the complexities of classroom life can constrain a teacher's ability to attend to his/her theoretical beliefs and provide instruction that is consistent with them (Johnson 1995:33). Thus, a teacher's theoretical beliefs may be more situational, transferring into instructional practices only in relation to the complexities of the particular classroom.

By understanding the nature of a teacher's frame of references, we may understand, at least in part, the filter through which s/he makes decisions while teaching. The following data on TB and TD was gathered in a single interview session with each teacher. It was after much persuasion that both teachers agreed to being interviewed. They said that their hectic school days did not offer time for interviews, and agreed to only one interview each after classroom

observations had ended, when we had become more familiar with each other. Both interviews were held after school, in the library. Both teachers said that they would combine their library duty with the interview. This meant that during both interviews, we were interrupted as many as four times by student librarians needing the teacher's help with carrying out library duties.

The interviews were semi-structured: whilst I did refer to a list of topics which formed my interview schedule, I did not have specific questions, and sometimes let the interview be directed by the teacher. Both interviews covered, to varying degrees, the same topics, and what follows is a summary of what each teacher said, where possible, in her own words.

### **8.3.1.1 TB**

TB is Malay, 40 years old, and a mother of five boys. She speaks, reads and writes English and Malay.

#### *Educational background and professional training*

She was educated in multi-racial, English medium, government primary and secondary schools, where she learned 'Malay as a second language'. After completing 'A' levels, TB underwent a two-year teacher training programme at Institute of Education, Singapore, where she received training to teach lower secondary English and Malay.

#### *Teaching experience*

TB has, since completing teacher training, been teaching in School-X, where she has never taught Malay. She began with teaching English and English Literature, but after ten years, switched to teaching English and History. She has taught secondary one and two students at School-X for 20 years.

#### *Perceptions of her teaching:*

##### **Diary Writing**

*"This is new for me. My sons don't have to write diaries in schools. I can understand that it gives students opportunities to write. It's a practice for writing basically. We give essays at most twice in a month but now with diary writing they are actually forced to sit down and*

write. Actually, the HOD said 'have to write diary for every lesson'. Then I said 'not manageable' - sometimes I'm still struggling to read their diaries. So for me I do it weekly. I give them a topic on Friday and collect their diary on Monday.

When asked to comment on student entries:

*It's interesting – when I give them topics on their views – I can see what they think. Like with 'My impressions of the school', 'My most boring or interesting lesson'. For me, it is quite an eye-opener. I have to give them topics because without topic – some will write, some won't. The minimum length is three-quarter of a small exercise book. The maximum is one page. Very few students write less than three-quarter (of a page). ”*

When asked what happens when students write less than the required three-quarter page:

*“A few of them have written half a page. So what I did was I wrote a comment that by next time I need three-quarter of a page. Not less than half page. Usually they listen to me. No point in punishing them. Then they will see it more as a chore.”*

TB shows flexibility: it seems that students can write between half to three-quarter a page. This conforms with what was observed in lessons.

### **Group work**

*“I think the students do enjoy it because I read their diary entries and they say they love discussing in groups. But they have to learn to get along with each other during group work. This may not be easy.”*

### **General perceptions of Class B students**

*“Generally they are motivated, and come from fairly good stable families. They are not as subdued as 1A students who are quieter. These people are willing to speak more, I find they do group work well. They also don't give me much trouble with discipline – one or two can be a bit playful, but you know boys will be boys. They want attention and sometimes I give in but sometimes I just ignore (them).”*

She does not mention that the class frequently gets noisy – and I take this to mean that it is just a reflection of students' willingness to speak more, and that she does not perceive the high noise level as problematic.



### Views on class discipline

*"In English (lessons) when they do something wrong like when they are playful, we can't scold them all the time because then they will clam up and not share. And I don't want this kind of class where the students clam up and don't share Boring for them, boring for me. So of course I don't want to spoil the mood, (so) I don't punish them."*

When asked if she minds her students speaking other languages during her lessons:

*"They normally speak English when I am walking around but I know sometimes they speak Chinese or Malay. This cannot be helped."*

### Views on what makes a good language learner

*"Firstly, a good language learner has to practice or use the language. Then he has to pick up certain language rules. He must try to use the language in the appropriate circumstances, and must be willing to share in class discussions. Also he must read a lot."*

### Perceptions of Normal Technical students

*"Normal Tec students sometimes got a lot of family problems, not like, I think, the Express students – they come from more stable families. Normal Tec is a different thing (i.e. stream) altogether. The students are slightly different. Once, I had to sit in for their English teacher. We looked at their (English) textbooks. The activities were very simple, but still I found they had difficulty comprehending. When they had to rephrase the sentence for an activity, they could not answer because they did not know some of the words which are simple words and we think they should know. And so when I was walking around they were asking me again and again, 'Tcher what is this? What is this?' because they didn't understand."*

*I think it's very sad to label them. I think 1D students - generally with my contact with Normal Tec over the years - they do have this kind of feeling that they are inferior. It's important that we teachers don't brand them. Already they feel they are like that (inferior) and if the teacher keep telling them that they are hopeless, then we don't help them. We should help to give them self-esteem."*

When I commented that I observed that Class D students speak mostly Malay during lessons:

*"In 1D they are mostly Malay, and so it's natural for students to speak Malay, isn't it?"*

Interestingly, this does not seem to be TD's understanding.



Given TB's views on how good English language learners *use* the language, it follows that by speaking Malay, Class D students are therefore not likely to be(come) good English language learners.

### *Views and attitudes towards staff morale, and the school itself*

*"The morale among us English teachers is not fantastic, especially now there is so much stress. You know (Mr-HOD - the new Head of the English Department) – he has told us that English teachers will be observed twice now. Previously, it used to be once a year. Now it's twice. No doubt he said it's going to be a sharing thing – but it's very stressful for us. Especially for (TD) who has to teach Sec. ones (Secondary ones) and Sec. fours. It's very hard for her - that's why she tells me she wants to resign. This is the first time she is teaching lower Sec. Lower Sec. and upper Sec. are very different. For a teacher, it is like speaking two different languages. So she has to re-teach herself and re-pace herself (with 1D). She said that she's so uncomfortable with lower Sec. – especially with Normal Tec – worse still. Because you know Normal Tec. are a different thing altogether."*

#### **8.3.1.2 TD**

TD is Indian, 38 years old, married and without children. She speaks, reads and writes English, Malay and Punjabi.

### *Educational background and professional training*

She was educated in the same type of Singaporean government schools as TB, and learnt 'Malay as a second language' as well. After completing her 'A' levels, like TB, she did a two-year teacher training programme where she received training to teach (unlike TB) lower and upper secondary English and History.

### *Teaching experience*

Over her thirteen year teaching history, TD has taught at three government schools. She has just begun teaching at School-X. She now teaches English and History, although in her previous postings, she also taught Literature. She is happy that she does not teach Literature any more, and as she explains why, her words reflect a certain jadedness: *"Very hard to get a response from the kind of people who started taking Literature. They (the students) were very*

*insensitive people, and for Lit (literature) you have to go beyond (understanding) – so I was quite glad to give it up.”*

Only once in thirteen years, has she taught lower secondary students, and this was seven years ago. Now, with Class D (her only lower secondary class in School-X), she is teaching this age group once again.

### ***Perceptions of her teaching practices:***

TD uses a textbook and a workbook which have been specifically designed for Normal Tec students. When asked to comment on these books:

*“To me they are ok – something to move on with. As I told you, I’m not being very adventurous with the Sec. ones. I’ve decided to give the Sec. fours my attention (i.e. she is preparing them for their crucial end of year exams). As far as I’m concerned, I just have to somehow manage the Sec. ones. I’ll be sticking to the textbooks - they seem all right for the time being - restrictive but I think adequate.”*

TD is consistent with what she has said to me before: her focus is the Sec. fours, and as far as Class D is concerned, she somehow has to manage them, and the texts, despite being restrictive, are adequate and something to move on with.

### **Diary Writing**

*“The main reason I do diary writing is because the school wants it. I know (Mr-HOD) asks his students to write the diary everyday. I can’t do it everyday. I do it once a week because I feel that if I read (diary entries) and don’t react (with comments), I think I will disappoint the students. If I was to ask them to write everyday, no way will I be able to react. I am teaching three classes English. So I don’t care what he (HOD) says, but I think when the time comes he will question me.”*

This is a similar response to TB’s: both teachers appear to feel somewhat stressed by the new HOD’s demands regarding diary writing, and both do what they think they can cope with. Like TB, TD sees diary writing as a good idea:

*“In compo there is a little bit of tension when they have to produce things. In diaries they can let their ideas flow because they don’t have to worry about grammar and structures. I think it’s a good idea for them to write the diary.”*

When asked if entries are the minimum twelve lines in length:

*"They still struggle over writing twelve lines but I don't care and I told them to increase (to more than twelve lines)."*

I look surprised and TD laughs at my reaction. I am however more surprised when she adds:  
*"All of them usually give me their diaries."*

This does not correspond with lesson observations, as there were numerous instances, as illustrated in 7.4.2, when students were punished for entries which were too short, or for not submitting their diary.

### **Pair/Group work**

*"I would rather use more pair work than group work with this class. They are quite restless. If I put all these naughty boys in groups, not everybody will be doing work, and they will start talking all kinds of rubbish. Group work for this class is not very effective but I would still like to use it once in a blue moon – depending on the nature of the assignment. If there is a lot of colouring, and it's something light, I will let them do group work. But if it's some serious work, then I think pair work is better."*

TD seems to know her class's needs when she says that group work is ineffective. I too had observed that students were not as able as those of Class B to manage working in groups. For TD, this is possibly because they speak about *"all kinds of rubbish"*. For me, it is because students seem to need more close guidance than group work generally provides.

### **Overhead transparencies (OHTs)**

TD again shows an awareness of her students' needs in the following:

*"It works for them because they can't listen all the time, and they need something visual. I would use it with them depending on the topic because it can be more effective. If I had a more academic class, then I would probably use it less. They are Normal Tec, and chances are they don't learn like normal students learn. These students need variety because their listening span is too short. They seem to be more responsive to visuals."*

She recognises that Normal Tec students seem to have specific needs – in her words, they do not learn like *"normal"* students do.

When asked if she would make more use of OHTS in future lessons:

*I have so far used OHTs once only and I think they liked it. I should use more of it. But there are not so many OHTs that come with the text. And I don't have the time to make my own. So, too bad (TD shrugs at this point)."*

This is an example of how the demands of a teacher's workload transfers into instructional practices that are inconsistent with what she knows she ought to be doing (in terms of how students would learn better, and how she should therefore be teaching).

#### **On using audio-tapes that come with the text:**

*"I have also started to use the listening compre (comprehension) tape. I think it's quite enjoyable. The first one I did wasn't too good. I didn't focus the activity well, and I did not draw them into what was expected. I went a little too fast and I think they were lost. But the second one was much better because I knew how to draw them in first before listening to the tape."*

Again TD shows an awareness of her students' specific needs. She is clearly used to teaching older and more capable students, and seems to realise that with Class D, she needs to modify her method of instruction. She appears to be learning on the job.

#### **Perceptions of Normal Technical students**

*"When I first heard 'Normal Tec', I was expecting something worse. When I first went in – well, first of all I'm just not used to handling small kids. And then when I saw them talking away – I am just not used to this kind of behaviour. So my number one problem with this class is discipline because with my classes when I walk in means 'you shut up'. So I have to get them to stop talking. This means more than just telling them. I have to think 'what is the best discipline action to take?' These are very big adjustments. They are different from the Sec. fours. But now I think I can handle them, I can manage them"*

Like TB, TD sees Normal Tec students as being different from others. As I listened to her, I sensed her initial anxiety at having to teach these students. This seems to have prompted her to resort to discipline to achieve control over the students and the situation. It also appears that she views it as very important that students keep quiet when she talks.

#### **On student motivation**

*"I think for them being in Normal Tec really stings. I think they really feel like they are the tail end, the last class of the level. There is a stigma about being in 1D, ask them, and they will tell you."*

*"I see most of them trying. They are like other students. Only they need a lot of guidance. When I give them fill-in-the-blanks exercises in their workbook, they seem quite happy to do them. But it is different with compo. Some of them struggle to write compos. For the last*

*compo, I told them what to look out for, saying that they have to go through and check their work for subject-verb agreement- so they just focused on that and corrected that bit. They need more guidance."*

This corresponds with lesson observations. Students try, but they need close guidance. TD shows that she is adapting to her students as she alters her teaching to make their task (composition writing) more manageable.

### **Views on classroom discipline**

TD has faith in the powers of strict classroom discipline:

*"The whole class is much better now – after I was strict with them in the beginning."*

Yet, in her comment on SE4, I am not sure if she recognises that strict classroom management may have its limits:

*"You know he does not hand in his work – always forgets. I've had enough of him so I sent him for detention class today. I am just so angry with him. I will continue to make him stand in front of the class. But the next day he always repeats his mistakes. I think he is disinterested and slow. He is really hard core – nothing can affect him."*

Punishing SE4 does not, even by TD's admission, change his behaviour for the better. Yet, she continues to administer punishment. Listening to her, I could not help wondering if she was herself tired and somewhat disillusioned with teaching in general, and teaching these students in particular.

### **When asked to comment on the 'black book' that she keeps:**

*"My 'black book' is actually white. Basically, I write the names of people who have not done their work or who are giving me trouble. I carry it around for all classes just to frighten them. Just to frighten the students. I started it for the first time this year since I became a form teacher. It's quite hectic, so I've learnt to carry one because there's a lot to remember. I write the names of students who don't bring their book. Or don't do their homework. Three times and they go for detention."*

Again, it seems very important for her that she is in control of her students.

### **Views on what makes a good language learner**

*"First and most important is discipline. Second they need to be attentive. Thirdly, they must always try, and lastly, they must go beyond what the teacher says and pick up books they like - which as far as I can see, is quite impossible for this class."*

She is consistent in her belief that discipline is the road to learning, but seems not to hold out much hope for Class D.

When asked if it is important that students question when in doubt:

*"Oh yes. They must ask. But they actually do ask me the meaning of a word when they don't know. Or when they are not sure of something."*

I remember being amazed with this answer because it clearly did not square with lesson observations. Rarely did students ask questions.

### *Views and attitudes to the school and staff morale*

*"As a newcomer to the school, I don't like the classrooms because I think the furniture could be better. The blackboard could be better. The books in the school library are old."*

*As a new comer, for English and History, I am working on my own. At the beginning of the year, we are told we have to (get students to) do four compres and four compos, inclusive of tests and that's it. Plus we are given the syllabus and scheme of work. They are hand-me-downs, and as we go along we can modify what we don't like. So it's up to us. I don't mind this. But the HOD has given us the schedule to say that he is coming to observe us. I don't want to be observed – I told him first of March I am resigning because I don't like this observation business. I don't like that he is coming around to observe us."*

This echoes what TB says about feeling pressured by the demands of the new HOD, and about how it is all too much for TD. Both teachers appear to feel threatened by observations. As I listen to TD, I know that by observing and interviewing her, I am adding to her stress and discomfort. In their own subtle ways, these teachers have informed me of their unease with my presence in their lessons.

### **8.3.2. Students's Frames of References**

Students exercise their power as co-creators of the classroom experience in their interpretations of and responses to what teachers say and do. How a student interprets what happens in the classroom is dependent upon the sum of prior experiences as student and second language learner, and on views and attitudes towards education, learning, authority etc. These are in part at least, shaped by the student's cultural and linguistic background. All these influencing factors are together referred to as a student's frame of reference.



Unable to obtain basic information on students' background from teachers and the Vice-Principal (who politely told me that she could not allow me access to such information) a questionnaire was designed and administered (see 4.5.4). There were also the eight student interviews (four with each class – see 4.5.2). The rest of this section draws on questionnaire and interview data to compose students' frames of references. These frames present multiple perspectives, and also enable, through triangulation, a validation of researcher interpretations of lesson observations. Due to the breadth of data collected, this section reports only on data that further inform or triangulate interpretations of emergent issues and themes, and are therefore theoretically important. To this end, I shall use extracts from interviews and questionnaires as data fragments<sup>15</sup> to compose students' frame of references. As the unit of analysis here is the class and not individual students, data extracts are presented in terms of each class. (A full report summarising questionnaire data, as well as a statement on the truth-value of this data is presented in Appendix L: 405)

### **Class composition by ethnicity:**

Table 5.1:131 shows the ethnic composition of each class. 56 % of Class B is Chinese, compared with only 10 % in Class D. 34 % of Class B is Malay, but in Class D, this figure is 83 %. These figures should be understood in terms of both the population composition of Singapore (77 % Chinese, 14 % Malay, and 7 % Indian), and in terms of the school population (39 % Chinese, 55% Malays, 2% Indians). Based on their performance in the PSLE exams, pupils have been channelled by the Ministry of Education and School-X into different streams and classes. The figures show how streaming has resulted in an accumulation of Chinese pupils in Class B, and Malay pupils in Class D. Although the school has a 55 % Malay pupil population, only 34 % are in the top-end class. There is a slightly larger representation of Indians in Class B. That the Chinese gather in the top-end class and the Malays in the tail-end class corresponds with what was reported in Chapter 5.10.2 on inequality of performance between these two ethnic groups.

### **Parents' educational attainment**

There appears to be a marked difference between the two classes in the educational level of students' mothers. This is not the case when comparing the educational attainment of fathers.

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<sup>15</sup> This is done with a concerted effort to avoid 'researcher selectivity' - where the researcher uses fragments of data to illustrate a priori theoretical assumptions.



The mothers of students in Class B have more formal education than those of Class D. Unlike the 'seventeen' mothers of Class B students, nine mothers of Class D students have a secondary education. Both Class B and Class D students have generally been in school for the same number of years, but as far as performance is concerned, Class B students are already faring better academically by qualifying for the Express stream (see Appendix L1: 405). Looking at 'parents occupations', again the difference is more marked with the mothers. More mothers of Class B students are housewives: so while they have more education than Class D mothers do, fewer of them work. (see Appendix L1: 405).

### **Linguistic background and home languages**

Five students in Class B say that English was the language they first learnt to speak, compared with one in Class D. When asked for the language most comfortable with at home, ten students in Class B mention English compared with the four in Class D (Appendix L2: 407). There is therefore more use of English in Class B homes, suggesting a greater degree of linguistic shift away from ethnic languages to English, the language of modernity and economic progress.

### **Becoming a student of School-X and of the class**

Twelve (38%) students of Class B had (at the end of Primary Six) selected School-X as one of the six secondary schools they would like to attend (see Appendix L3: 410). This means that 20 students arrived at School-X without having listed it as a choice. This hints at the relatively poor performance of these students in the national examinations (PSLE), such that they did not qualify for any of their chosen schools. It also hints at School-X's low national standing in terms of the quality of students it receives. Unlike the twelve of Class B, 27 Class D students (90%) had included School-X as one of their six choices.

When questioned further about School-X's position on their list (the list is ranked with one being the school students most want to attend), the two classes again had contrasting responses. As many as thirteen Class D students had listed School-X as their first choice whereas most of the twelve Class B respondents had placed it amongst the bottom three positions (see Appendix L3: 410). This marked difference suggests that these groups of students either perceive the same school differently, or that they perceive the school similarly, but have different educational aspirations. Class B students or their parents see

School-X as less desirable than Class D parents/students, and correspondingly, a far smaller number of Class B respondents want to be students of School-X (see Appendix L3: 410).

### **Attitudes to School-X**

20 respondents in Class B wrote of their negative emotions when they first discovered that they had been posted to School-X. This correlates with the 20 students who had not selected School-X in the first place. Their responses reveal their disappointment. One said that she was *"sad and disappointed"*; another was very sad and unhappy because her Primary Six classmates had said that it was *"a lousy school"*; and a male student said he *"almost broke out in tears"*. Others explained their reaction, saying that School-X is a "bad school", *"with not very good school facilities"*; it is *"a Malay school with a lot of gangsters"*; and the teachers and reputation of the school are *"not very good"* (Appendix L3: 410). Another student described her reaction in an interview as follows: *"It was very embarrassing to tell my parents friend that I'm in this school because it was only my 6<sup>th</sup> choice."*

In contrast, only six respondents in Class D said that they felt negatively, and this more because of the school's location, etc., than because of the poor reputation of the school. Only one Class D student referred negatively to School-X, writing that she was sad, and regretted not having prepared better for the PSLE exams.

### **Attitudes to the stream**

Class B was generally happy to have made it to the Express stream. Students felt they were fulfilling their *"dream of getting into the Express stream"*; proud at being *"better than the Normal (stream students)"*. With one respondent, there was relief because his parents had wished him to qualify for the Express stream, and had he not made it, *"it would be a shame on my family"* (Appendix L3: 410).

In Class D, the general response to being sent to Normal Technical was one of *"sadness and shame"*. Responses were strongly phrased, with a student describing his fear when breaking the news to his parents, saying that he *"feels scare because my father will canned me"*.

Both sets of responses convey a wide range of student perceptions of Express and Normal Technical streams, including the feelings and status attached to each. Securing a place in the

Express stream seems to be a shared goal. This is interesting and indicates that after almost two decades of the streaming system (since 1979), with the ministry presenting Normal Technical and Normal Academic streams as the norm (and so the term ‘normal’), students still view them negatively, and aspire to qualify for the Express stream.

## **Learning English and English lessons**

When asked about their English lessons (Appendix L4: 417), Class B made mostly positive comments, saying they found lessons interesting, exciting, challenging, easy to understand, etc. A student declared TB *“my favourite teacher. I love having my lessons with her. How I wish she could teach me all the subjects”*. However, students also made negative comments – eight of which specifically refer to inadequate classroom management and high noise level: *“The class is always very noisy”*; *“The noise is terrible, the class including me are not paying attention”*; *“I think she must (i.e. should) be fierce with us so that everybody will keep quiet and pay attention to what she wants to teach”*.

Class D students commented that their lessons are fun, and that TD is *“a very patient teacher”*. Hardly any comments were negative, and even when they were, they were mildly worded: *‘She like to scold us everyday because of the naughty ones’*. One respondent who was often scolded in class, and frequently made to stand during lessons for speaking Malay said, to my surprise, that TD *“didn’t scold us”*. This does not square with lesson observations, and left me wondering if students were providing appropriate responses - responses perceived as correct, or polite - instead of responses which reflected reality.

When asked to be critical of their lessons, the classes respond differently. Class B students appear more critical. Perhaps as relatively good students, they may have higher expectations of their teachers, or they may be more aware of their rights as to what teachers should do for them. Or it may be that they simply have the confidence to be critical and the linguistic competence to express their criticisms.

## **Speaking only English during English lessons**

When asked for their opinion on the rule requiring only English during English lessons (Appendix L5: 422), all but four Class B students thought it was a good idea, with thirteen reasoning that this would improve their English. Some explained that it was wrong to speak

another language, because – *“it is unfair for others who do not understand that particular language”*. Those who disagreed with this rule explained that *“It’s because sometimes it’s hard to say certain words so we have to say it in our own language”*.

The responses in Class D were surprisingly similar, with all but five students saying that they thought it was a good idea. Again thirteen students said that this would help them improve their English. The five who disagreed said they were *“angry and unhappy”*, because they *“cannot speak English well”*, or that they felt ashamed because they only *“know to speak a few English”*. For these respondents, English appears to be an alien language, yet they must cope with being educated in English. In principle however they seem to understand and expect, as do Class B students, the ‘speak only English’ rule.

## Discipline

When asked if any action should be taken against students who speak another language during English lessons (Appendix L5: 422), 24 Class B students say ‘yes’, explaining that it is important that the rule is adhered to, and that it is the teacher’s duty to act as rule-enforcer. The following responses show the (Singaporean) student’s perception as to how teachers must enforce discipline:

*“She, as the teacher, has the right to do anything to us.”*

*“If the teacher do not punish the pupil, he would be more daring next time.”*

What is also suggested is that punishment can be a good thing:

*“If I was wrong I would deserve it because teacher punish us because she would like to change our bad attitude.”*

Together, these comments suggest that a teacher who does not keep her students disciplined, even through the use of punishment (when called for), is one who is not doing her job.

When asked to propose the action(s) that should be taken against students who break class rules, responses range from the teacher issuing the student with a reminder, to making students write lines, to sending students for detention class. If the student were to continue to break the rule, students write that s/he should be sent to the principal. Students explained that punishment should be administered because *“If you did something wrong, you ought to be punish”*. Others say that punishment is good because it alters students’ behaviour such that: *“he would feel more ashamed and would not do it again”*, and *“this would help them to pay more attention during (English) lessons”*.

The responses in Class D are similar with 26 of the 31 students writing that TD should punish students who speak another language mostly because English is important in their life, and she only wants them to improve their English for their future, and *“if she don’t punish them. They will continue to beriks (break) the rule”*. Students who think that the teacher should not take action propose similar reasons to those presented by Class B, the most common being that sometimes students do not know how to say what they want in English.

Like in Class B, Class D students justify student punishment, saying that *“after all a rule has been broken”*. Punishment will *“make the pupils not be a playful person and he/she will be a responsible person”*. Others reason that punishment is for their own good as, in the long run, it will help them improve their English.

When proposing the action teachers should take against offending students (Appendix I2:376), students make the same range of suggestions as Class B, the only difference being the suggestion that offending students should be made to stand just outside the class, *“so that other students from other class will see”* the offender being punished. This is consistent with what SD4 said in an interview about punishments. Regularly punished by TD, mostly for speaking Malay, SD4 explained how for him the worst punishment, was being made to stand at the front door. To be seen like this by students of other classes was utterly humiliating.

## Seeking clarification

When uncertain of the teacher’s explanation or instruction (Appendix L6: 427), 25 Class B students say they would ask their teacher to clarify or explain, with four of these saying that they would approach her personally. In an interview, a student said, *“If not sure, of course we ask – nothing to be scared (of). If don’t ask, wait become stupid”* (i.e. if students do not clarify, they do not learn). Later in the interview, the following exchange takes place:

### Key:

R        researcher  
S        student interviewee (no attempt is made to differentiate among the three students)  
SS       student interviewees

R        do you think that instructions are important for students?  
SS       yes

- R why?  
 S because then we can do our work properly, systematically  
 R but what happens if students are sometimes too scared to ask the teacher questions?  
 S no, nothing to be scared (of)  
 R ok, what happens if a student does not ask, goes home and because he is not sure, he does his homework whatever way he wants. Is this ok?  
 SS no  
 S you get punishment. You get scolding. You are the only one who does not do it properly.  
 R so it is important to do home work properly?  
 S yes so you will not get punished

Students emphasise the importance of doing (home)work properly and systematically, but their responses regarding punishment suggest that they are speaking not just of English lessons but of all lessons. Lesson observations and student interviews reveal that TB does not punish them.

Yet, there are instances when these students would not seek clarification. In an interview, a student explained that that while she was unafraid to ask TB questions, she would not dare question her Maths teacher who is very strict: *"If (T-Maths), we won't ask her. We'll ask our friend because (T-Maths) will scold us – 'I told you to pay attention!' – so we're too frighten"*. I wondered if Class D was frightened of TD.

In Class D (Appendix L6: 427), nineteen (compared with Class B's 25) students write that they would ask TD for clarification. However, only one (compared to the four of Class B) said they would ask the teacher personally. That nineteen students say they *would* clarify though does not square with lesson observations. Perhaps students are again providing ideal responses, saying what they should be doing instead of what they actually do. However, there does appear to be a difference between the two classes in the number who say they would seek clarification, and this difference is consistent with lesson observations.

In interviews, when asked if it was important to seek clarification when in doubt, students said "yes", explaining that *"If we do the things wrong, then teacher will scold us."* There was however some hesitation in asking TD for clarification:

*"I ask friends first. If friends don't know, then ask teacher."*

*"Wait (TD) get angry (i.e. 'if I ask, TD will get angry') 'so better ask the friend first. I ask the people who sit in front."*

*"If Maths means I surely ask friends first."*

The responses here are more similar to what was observed during lessons.



## **Student attitudes to teacher behaviour**

When commenting on TB (Appendix L7: 430), half the respondents, say that they find her *“not strict enough”*; *“She is very tolerant and she sometimes can’t control the class when the class is noisy”*; *“She should be more alert about pupils not attentive and playing a fool”*.

Two students say that they do not like her because she *“seldom punish us”*.

In interviews, some students explained how although TB does not punish them, she can be *“quite fierce”*: *“Sometimes when we are noisy, she just sits there and looks at us with her big eyes. Make us very scared, and we keep quiet”*.

Another two students found her lessons not challenging enough and three were unhappy with her for saying that their class was not as good as 1A.

In direct contrast, the most common complaint in Class D is that expressed by thirteen respondents (Appendix L7: 430), who say that they do not like TD when she is too strict: *“when she is very mean and fierce when I didn’t do my work”* or when she scolded or punished them. They also did not like their friends being punished. As with Class B, four students say that there was nothing about their teacher they did not like – *“She is good to me as I do all the work”* - this again hints at the teacher-student contract: if they are good and do all their work, their teacher will be good to them.

Comparing both sets of criticisms, those by Class B are not only more numerous but also cover a wider range - from the way the TB (under) controls her class, to the way she teaches, to even the way she dresses and speaks. This corresponds with their numerous and varied criticisms of their English lessons above, suggesting that Class B students are more forthcoming with their criticisms, and are more able to articulate them. However, on the basis of lesson observations, I cannot say that these students have more to complain about. Perhaps, as more successful and confident students, they have greater expectations of their teacher, and are more aware of what they should receive from her in terms of how she should teach.

## **Student explanation of their own behaviour**

### **Answering questions in Class B**

During an interview with Class B, I asked why they frequently volunteer to answer TB’s questions. Their responses were as follows:



*"So that she knows that we understand her lesson."*

*"When we talk, we look like we know something"*

*"It is important to answer the teacher's question to take care of her feelings and to take care of the class image. Also, when our answer is right, we look good. So we take care of our own image."*

It is clear that through answering questions, students aim to do much more than supply the correct answer. They come across as competent players of the classroom game, aware of the rules, and the subtleties of classroom interaction.

### **Answering Questions in Class D**

Class D explanations were somewhat more straightforward:

*"We answer questions because we want to become clever,"*

*"We want to improve our English, and so we practice speaking."*

*"If our answer is wrong, the teacher can correct us."*

Going by these responses, students answer questions to fulfil more basic level functions. Perhaps, constrained by language, they are unable to express answers as sophisticated as those of Class B students. Perhaps they are less aware of the subtleties of the classroom game.

### **Summary of Students' Frames of References**

The data indicate substantial similarities between the two classes. The students seem more similar than different. They care about their school performance and want to do well, they believe that it is important to speak English during English lessons so to improve their hold on the language. They respect their teachers, and have similar views regarding punishment in the classroom: the teacher who punishes her students does so out of care and concern. Both classes view it as important to do their work properly, to follow instructions, and both see it as important, in principle, to seek clarification when in doubt. Where they differ is that Class B students appear to be more critical of their lessons and their teacher.

During interviews, Class B students generally came across as more forthcoming with their responses. Their understanding of interview questions was quicker and more accurate, and their responses were more fluently expressed than those of Class D students. During Class B interviews, I had to work less to make students understand questions: there was generally

less prompting, and more repartee. Class B students also frequently incorporated reasoning (which was logically presented) into their explanations of preferences or opinions.

In Class D interviews, students offered reasons for preferences, but less frequently, and these were usually hesitantly expressed, and incorporated Malay expressions. What struck me was their general low level of comprehension and expression. These observations indicate that Class B students are better able to express their opinions in English. It is possibly also their competence in English which is to a large extent responsible for the fact that they are in the better class, and the better stream. Given the different streams these classes belong to, this is what we might expect.

#### **8.4. Interpreting and Explaining Teacher and Student Behaviours**

Having presented the teachers' and students' frames of references, the discussion now refers to concepts from the field to explain the similarities and differences in interaction patterns between the two microcultures. Interpretation and explanation draw on the following: participation structures, participant role relationships, academic task structures and social participation structures.

Teachers are generally characterised as controlling what is said and done in classrooms. Through determining how, when, where, and with whom language is to be used, they install and control patterns of communication. Teacher roles are, to an extent, pre-determined. The extent to which, and the ways in which they are pre-determined are influenced by the cultural context of the classroom. Although I began classroom observations without pre-allocating roles to teachers and students, my observations of the 28 lessons reveal that TB and TD controlled much of what was said and done in their classes. They had this control because of their special status as teachers, but needed to nevertheless work at maintaining their control over their students. This was achieved through adopting teacher roles, which in turn allocated roles to students. To analyse teacher roles in Class B and D, the discussion now considers the dominant patterns of classroom interaction which highlight the interplay between teachers and students, and the roles and positions adopted by and assigned to the each (Malamah-Thomas, 1987).

### **8.4.1. Dominant Patterns of Classroom Interaction**

Whilst both teachers display styles that are (albeit to different degrees) traditional and teacher-centred, TD's style comes across as more formal and authoritative. In total, the 28 lessons observed display key base-line features of conventional classroom organisation and management:

- Lessons in both classes were generally teacher-fronted. The teacher at centre-front doing most of the talking has the effect of creating a visible physical distance between her and the class.
- By casting themselves as the centre of attention, TB and TD (to varying degrees), exercised direct control over their class.
- Both teachers played the roles of instructor and controller, deciding what was acceptable performance, what the next steps in the lesson should be, when students should talk and what they should talk about.
- By seeking to control and transmit their subject content as experts, the teachers performed, again to different degrees, the role of 'knower' and 'informant'.

These similarities aside, the differences in their teaching styles resulted in differing dominant patterns of classroom interaction.

#### **8.4.1.1 Dominant patterns of interaction in TB's classroom**

In TB's teacher-centred classroom, she played the roles of instructor and controller, knower and informant. She played these roles consistently from the first lesson, LB1. The extracts in 7.4.1:194 show her approaching her students in a quietly authoritative manner, and generally providing firm direction and leadership. She would for example, determine the extent to which question-answer routines with an individual would be prolonged, and decided when students would have the floor, and for how long. An example of this is in LB1 when she let students discuss the issue of the type and colour of reading files at length, and then drew the discussion to an end (see discussion in 6.4.2:153). She also incorporated flexibility, combining formal orderly modes of behaviour with less formal ones, thereby adopting a mixed style. This is illustrated in B.CP.4, where TB shifted between a more formal voice (as she listed the different 'Strategies for Success' and 'Class Routines') and a less formal one (as she provided everyday examples of these points). She made light-hearted comments,

adopted a generally firm but humorous disposition, and allowed student movement and collaboration. This seems to have had the effect of encouraging student contributions and generally lightening the class atmosphere.

Lesson activities frequently entailed group work, corresponding with TB's views on the advantages of group work, expressed in the interview (see 8.3.1.1 above). During group work, she often stepped back, leaving students to get on with their task. With their teacher adopting the role of conductor and monitor by doing a minimal amount of talking, students had a chance to work with each other, resorting to TB for help when necessary. Exchanges between teacher and students occurred either on-task, or occasionally, at a personal level when students approached her individually, and the rest of the class were not expected to listen (see discussion in 7.5.1:208 of extract B.TI.4, lines 95-110).

Students interacted with others on and off-task, and individual students were often seen to contribute to the lesson without teacher-solicits, with the class as audience. TB also actively encouraged student suggestions. Examples of this are when students were asked to suggest when they would have their reading files ready in LB1, and when TB sought their agreement and support regarding displaying their photographs on the 'English' notice board in LB9 (see Appendix H:).

Included in classroom activities were meaning-focused exchanges with TB trying to elicit responses that related to students' home life. These exchanges provided opportunities for informal language use, and contained open-ended questions such as TB asking students to compare their daily life (in terms of household chores) with that of a character (Tim) in a comprehension lesson (LB6). With the daily newspaper article sharing activity, TB had students express their views on particular issues, and herself provided much English input through lecturing, commenting, and elaborating on student contributions, without, it appears, attempting to teach specific linguistic items. Meaning-focused exchanges generally involved students switching code, using Singlish to express themselves. On such occasions, TB remained meaning-focused, and used Singlish herself, and this seems to have the effect of minimising distance between teacher and students, and encouraging further communication (see discussion in B.CP.4, lines 99 – 119, in 7.3.1).

The Class B extracts in Chapter Seven show classroom interaction patterns that tend to be varied, and that reflect a high degree of student-involvement. At times, interaction was

spontaneous and carried a real communicative intent, and there were occasions when the lessons saw a shift of focus from teacher to students. These episodes were often initiated by students (when for example, they did not hand in homework in B.CM.3), and sometimes caused temporary derailment of the lesson. TB did not however seem too concerned, and would simply carry over the planned lesson to the next class (see LB5 in Appendix H:).

These interaction patterns suggest that in Class B's microculture, students take on active roles, expressing their opinions, views or doubts, and seeking clarification or confirmation. TB seemed more ready and willing to apply teaching methods that would help students be active, and to work creatively. In this sense, her teaching seemed to promote a degree of freedom for students in the classroom. Her flexibility and willingness to share limited control over the lesson seemed to encourage students to collaborate with her in classroom work. Yet, student freedom was contained within a classroom framework installed by TB. The handouts on class strategies and routines, and her constant reminders and explanations of class rules together constituted the framework that set limits for students regarding what they could do and how they could do it. 'Framework goals' (Ellis 1990) are lesson goals which apply to the structure and the structuring of the lesson. Viewed in this light, TB's classroom discourse, by relating actively to the organisation and direction of classroom activity, strongly addressed 'framework goals'.

#### **8.4.1.2 Dominant patterns of interaction in TD's classroom**

TD's teaching style was formal and traditional, the features of which are lecturing, one-to-one nomination and elicitation. In her teacher-centred classroom, she took on the roles of controller and instructor, and portrayed a traditional image of the teacher as transmitter of knowledge. An analysis into the participation structure of her lessons reveals the extent to which TD adopts control mechanisms:

The presentation and practice of grammatical rules generally took central position as TD appeared to focus on teaching formal linguistic features. With her authoritative manner and firm direction, she determined the extent to which question-answer routines with an individual was prolonged, and decided when (and which) students had the floor, and for how long. She also controlled student movement, and on occasion, student seating arrangements (see LD16, see Appendix H:). She directly suppressed informal interaction between students, and did not tolerate background talk, telling students to be quiet or to "*shut up*". In her

interview, she revealed that her *"number one problem with this class is discipline because with my classes when I walk in means 'you shut up'"*. Accordingly, in practically all of her sixteen lessons observed, she punishes a few students for talking, and carries a black book *"just to frighten them"*.

During teacher-fronted lessons, TD co-ordinated, and guided students closely through lesson material. In compliance, students slipped into the role of (passive) recipient, demonstrating their knowledge by reiterating known information as they participated in smooth flowing question-answer routines (see D.TI.3, discussed in Chapter Seven, but presented in full in Appendix I:). The mechanics of conducting such classroom activities would provide the teacher with control over the lesson procedure. Her close use of the textbook and workbook seemed at times more a matter of a means of student control rather than student learning, and her use of display or close-ended yes/no questions (seen for example in Appendix I:D.TI.3) constituted a convenient and orderly way of inviting student participation.

During group work, TD employed more direct control mechanisms as she monitored student collaboration closely (see D.TI.5, discussed at length in Chapter Seven). Although pair and group work offer competent students opportunities to stretch their skills, they presuppose a genuine willingness and ability to take part. For a formal and traditional teacher, group work activities are high-risk activities for the disruption they can cause. In her interview, TD talked of such activities with a degree of scepticism, saying that it would be difficult to know if students were speaking in the target language, or were even on task: *"...they will start talking all kinds of rubbish"*. Not surprisingly, TD said she would use group work *"once in a blue moon"*(see 8.3.1.2 above)

Based on Class D extracts in Chapter Seven, instruction and interaction were form-focused, with TD controlling discussions such that they remained focused on grammatical points and rules. Rarely were exchanges meaning-focused or driven by students: in D.CM.1, TD is telling her students not to speak Malay, when a student asks her a question:

- |      |                                                                                                                                                              |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| T    | I come here to teach you English. I must only hear English. Otherwise, I'll start speaking to you in my language, and you can see whether you understand me. |
| 10 S | tcher, your language is what- ((st bravely asks what TD's first language is))                                                                                |
| T    | ok, I am here to teach you English. I should only hear English.                                                                                              |

TD ignores the student question, and continues with her point.



Generally, in contrast to TB, TD addresses 'core goals' (Ellis, 1990) by giving precedence to pedagogic discourse, by concentrating largely on providing explicit instruction concerning the form of the target language, by monitoring student performance, and by checking that an activity is completed.

#### **8.4.2. Role Relationships in Class B and Class D**

The preceding section suggests that in Class D, TD's power was superior, and her students were subordinate. Her's was a position of dominance, as she maintained physical and psychological distance from the class while establishing a routine of interaction patterns that limited inter-student collaboration during activities. Her form-focused instruction also enabled her to closely manage and monitor what happened in the course of the lesson, thereby possibly reinforcing her assumptions about her teaching role as informant and controller and disciplinarian (which were described in 8.3.1.2).

TD's strong preference for silence was manifested in the way she regularly set learning tasks that students could achieve with minimal noise. For example, on one occasion during a writing assignment, students had to guess the likes and dislikes of their pair work partner instead of ask him/her – just so that the noise level could remain low (see LD7 in Appendix H:). The activity became less authentic, and not surprisingly, students seemed less motivated. TD appeared more concerned with management efficiency, rather than learning efficiency (Wright 1987). Her insistence on silence or near-silence also meant that students who talked risked being reprimanded and punished, emphasising once again their subordinate role. Indeed, TD's 'police and thief' discourse where she policed her students by "*catching them*" when they did not submit homework etc. (see discussion in D.CM.5) emphasised to students her superior role.

These strategies worked towards constructing, for TD, a safe and predictable framework of classroom organisation that established predictable and desired forms of behaviour. By actively asserting and maintaining her control, TD avoided classroom chaos. However, despite her concern with classroom order, her students reacted by continuing to break class rules, and to not do as told (see D.CM.1-6, where students do not write diary entries, continue to speak Malay in class, etc).



While both teachers were authoritarian in their manner, TB's behaviour showed greater flexibility. She displayed more affiliative behaviour through being assertive but simultaneously friendly and open. She frequently ignored disruptive behaviour but praised appropriate behaviour (see discussion in B.CM.5). TB allowed students responsibility for their learning by sharing her power, within limits, with the class, and this did not appear to work against the normal flow of the lesson.

TB adopted the roles of leader, facilitator, and guide through carefully managed and subtle control. Students were not punished, yet they knew she was in charge, and in their interviews, described the way she would for example silence them with a hard look, as I had seen her do in class (see B.CM.4). Her technique was no less effective than more typical verbal mechanisms of control. Her students were obviously competent at reading her cues and gave her what she wanted.

Inter-student communication was made integral to the lesson. TB's behaviour transmitted a sense of mutual respect, invited co-operation, and allowed students freedom within a mostly structured environment. Yet, there were times when students felt they had too much freedom, and in these instances, students took the initiative to lower, without much success, the noise-level of the classroom. They would, as they said in their interviews (see 8.3.2), and as was observed in B.CM.6, have appreciated more teacher control. Generally, in employing more democratic-like practices by getting the class to vote on issues and make suggestions, TB shared the responsibility of the teaching process with her class and sustained largely non-conflicting roles with her students.

#### ***8.4.3. Participation Structure in Class B and Class D***

This concept refers to the rights and obligations of participation with respect to who can talk and when in a social event (Erickson 1982).

##### **8.4.3.1 Teacher participation**

Teacher questions are a primary means of engaging learners' attention, promoting verbal responses, and evaluating learners' progress (Chaudron 1988:126). The nature and frequency of teacher questions also control the extent to which students are encouraged to participate in

classroom talk, and display the range of cognitive and affective demands made on students. Mehan (1979) sees teacher questions as a technique used to initiate interaction that stimulates the students' thinking and learning. As a means of control, questions regulate information flow. An analysis of the nature of teacher questioning practices and the purposes they serve in these classrooms, must, according to van Lier (1988:224), go beyond simplistic distinctions such as display and referential questions, yes/no and open-ended questions to investigate the different commitments and demands questions placed on learners.

Attentive as they were to classroom procedure, both teachers' questioning practices served to monitor or control what had to be done as well as how it had to be done so that orderly participation and a smooth running of the lesson were secured. TD tended to give precedence to information-seeking questions, employing a small number of feedback questions. She posed closed, known-information questions, repeating or rephrasing questions, as she prompted students to participate. As discussed in 8.2.2, classroom interaction during lesson activities in Class D were often ritualised, formulaic speech events where students provided expected answers, or completed TD's utterance with an expected syllable or word.

TB however seemed to favour the use of display questions, extending the range of elicitations to include genuine information as frequently occurring communicative questions reveal. The newspaper article sharing activities with which TB usually began lessons set the lesson tone with its numerous communicative questions. One of the main concerns of her lessons seemed to be to invoke students' participation as well as capture and maintain student attention.

Listening to the lesson recordings and reading the observation notes and lesson summaries, what come across is that both teachers held the position of primary speaker, structuring discourse with instructions, and eliciting information by asking questions. Until she was able to obtain the class seating-plan from the Monitoress, TD posed undirected questions to the whole class. TB, however, from the start, called out student names by referring to the class register. When students shouted out spontaneous responses, both teachers instructed them to bid for their turn by raising their hand (see D.CP.1-3). They then nominated a student to provide the answer. Once nominated, TD would go further and insist that the student stand to answer.

As discussed in 8.2.2, in Class D, more than in Class B, lesson procedure was based on the execution of pre-set activities from the textbook or workbook. It follows that in this class, more often than not, more than one person speaking at a time occurred mostly at the beginning or end of a lesson, or between activities or during moments of confusion or conflict regarding some aspect of lesson procedure. In Class B, during whole class discussions, TB, in the main, maintained control such that one person could speak at a time. During pair work or group work however, students were generally left in charge of their own interaction – and such unmonitored interaction often led to high noise levels (see B.CM.6).

#### **8.4.3.2 Student participation**

As discussed above, in both classes, student participation occurred primarily through individual student nomination and was regulated by clear signals from the teachers regarding permissible ways of participating such as raising hand for floor (instead of shouting out answers) and standing to answer. Those sitting closer to the front of the classroom were observed to be unsurprisingly (given that students had chosen their seats) more attentive to lesson procedure, and frequently the first to complete learning tasks. Those seated further away from the teacher were generally less attentive.

In Class B, exchanges initiated by students were generally not suppressed. There were ample instances of students bidding for turns, seeking clarification and explanation, and negotiating with TB over when homework had to be ready for. When unsure of instructions, students, as seen in B.TI extracts, did not hesitate interrupting TB with clarification or confirmation requests. In these instances, TB paused the lesson to address their questions. Even when students sought confirmation repeatedly, for example when they wanted to know how they had to do corrections, TB continued to answer their questions.

This was not generally the case in Class D, where communicative exchanges and student questions were in the main not encouraged. When, on one occasion, a student sought confirmation regarding having to write the date (Extract D.TI.1), TD's quick, abrupt reply "*of course*", suggested that the answer to the question was obvious. Such a response could potentially threaten the student with a 'loss of face'. On other occasions, when students interjected with questions, TD sometimes ignored them, or told them not to interrupt. Allowing questions to interrupt teacher-talk could lead to a loss of control as questions could (momentarily at least) redirect the lesson, causing disruptions in the planned lesson.

As discussed earlier, student-participation in Class D seemed to be limited and mechanical: the repertoire of responses following teacher elicitation was frequently restricted to single words, (often incomplete) phrases, or text reiterations. By repeating TD's words, or by completing her utterances with the correct syllable, students showed that they were in touch with classroom proceedings. They were quick to play their role in such exchanges, displaying their knowledge of ritualised routines as they participated in the 'ritual of the lesson' (Holliday 1994:36).

Whilst the less active participants of both classes would volunteer to answer (by raising hand) and then wait to be nominated, more active and spontaneous students often said or shouted out answers. In their interviews, students of both classes provided interesting explanations of why they answered questions (see 8.3.2). Through their answering behaviour, Class B students actively looked after their self-image, their teacher and their learning. Both sets of students took advantage of their right to answer questions, showing that they were aware of the role that answering questions played in the larger game of the classroom. However, perhaps only because they were more articulate, Class B responses reflect a greater awareness amongst students of the range of purposes that student answers can serve.

As regards the language used during lessons, although interview and questionnaire data discussed in 8.3.2 consistently show that students of both classes felt it was important to speak English, they nevertheless often used Chinese or Malay, especially during group work. Generally, students were more likely to speak English in inter-student communication when some of the group were either non-Chinese or Malay speaking. I regularly heard students of both classes reminding each other to keep to English when there were other members who could not understand the language being spoken (i.e. either Chinese or Malay). Despite what they said in interviews and questionnaires, students spoke English more out of social rather than pedagogical reasons.

#### **8.4.3.3 Academic task structure (ATS) and Social participation structure (SPS)**

In his discussion of participation structure, Erickson (see Chapter 2.8.3) holds that for successful student participation in classroom events, students need to accurately perceive

both subject matter information and the social organisation of participation. Verbal interaction in the classroom consists of two interrelated structures: academic task structure (the sequencing of subject matter in the lesson) and social participation structure (the allocation of interaction rights and obligations of participants that shape classroom discourse).

To participate effectively in classroom events, students must accurately infer their teacher's expectations and intentions, the contextualised cues embedded within classroom events, and the ATS and SPS for those events. The easier it is to infer these – i.e. the more transparent these are, the easier it is for learners to participate effectively. When a student gives an unexpected or incorrect response, the teacher has to adjust either the ATS and/or the SPS. Such adjustments allow teachers to simplify learning tasks for students and (re)assess students' knowledge of subject matter.

The instances when Class D students had difficulty recognising and fitting into the structure of the lesson occurred mostly because they misinterpreted the ATS embedded in the lesson, or misunderstood TD's verbal cues outlining this structure. An example of this is seen in extract D.TI.5 (in 7.5.2) where task instructions were unclear. The ATS was only made clear at the end of the lesson during group work presentation, when it was too late as the group had been given a fail mark.

In terms of SPS, TD adopted an approach (unlike TB's) that seemed to assume that students already knew the expected social participation structure. There was minimal installation of procedure for participation. This is illustrated in D.CP.1-6. TD made explicit how she expected students to participate only after they had stepped out of line. The SPS in Class D was also rigid, and students were not permitted to modify it. Such rigidity in SPS, would serve to exclude students from the lesson by building barriers instead of bridges between students and lesson. Whilst firm lesson structures, in terms of well-established routines can provide security in the classroom, too much rigidity can lead to the microculture becoming less open to modification and change, less open to ATS or SPS adjustments.

TB on the other hand allowed for more variability and flexibility in her control of ATS and SPS. As a result of this, students were allowed greater leeway in answering questions, and to actively contribute to both content and structure of the lesson. This apart, she also spent a significant proportion of early lessons setting up ATS and SPS, taking pains to present and

explain them to students carefully and clearly (see 7.3.1). Consequently, students were generally clearer than their counterparts in Class D regarding what was to be done and how they were to do it. There was also less room for misunderstanding teacher instructions or lesson procedure, as students were better able to infer teacher expectations, intentions, contextualised cues and conventions.

## **8.5. Relationship between Constituent Parts and Microculture**

Having looked at teacher installation of classroom procedure, management of control and order, and delivery of task instructions, the discussion now explores how these parts relate to the microculture of the class.

### **8.5.1. How Constituent Parts relate to Class B's Microculture**

TB's constant and thorough attention to classroom procedure conveyed to students the importance of following proper procedure. When students spoke during teacher-talk, she reacted by reminding them of the rule they were breaking and then explaining why it was important that they abide by the rule (see B.CM.1). She explained repeatedly that one person must speak at a time, telling students that this displayed their respect for each other. When students did not behave according to her expectations, she would refer them back to the handout on 'Class Routines'. When they did not submit homework, and then did not inform her of this, she urged them to, in future, "*do the polite thing*" and inform her. When annoyed with students for talking, she silently stared at them until they fell silent (see 7.4.1).

The forms of management reprimands across both classes were qualitatively different in the sense that TB was more inclined towards making mild reprimands - 'mild' because her reprimands were delivered calmly, with a neutral facial expression, and politely. Reprimands appeared as low-key interventional attempts to change students' behaviour. Her lessons in general downplayed strict, authoritarian control, and manifested a mode of teacher behaviour that sought to establish a non-disciplinarian identity and a policy of assertive discipline. Perhaps this is due to a pragmatic awareness (acquired over twenty years of teaching lower secondary students) that hard-nosed control would not necessarily be more effective.

TB's patient handling of student clarifications and confirmations reassured students that they could ask questions, and that these questions, even when unsolicited, would be answered. It



is empowering for students to have their questions taken seriously - even if it meant that in answering them, TB would let the lesson to be momentarily derailed.

In task instructions, TB was consistent in her attention to procedure, delivering systematic and thorough instructions repeatedly (see 7.5.1). Despite being detailed and thorough, instructions were nevertheless often followed by more student clarification and confirmation requests. This suggests the following:

- Students knew that TB was particular about what she wanted them to do and how she wanted it done. They were aware that failure to execute a task in the desired way would incur teacher disapproval, and they therefore took active steps to confirm their understanding of task procedures. When uncertain of task instructions, they knew that the onus was on them to ask. This assumes that they had already learnt to take responsibility for their education.
- In being thorough in her instructions, telling students what they should and should not do, TB invariably left information gaps that instructions did not cover, or did not cover clearly enough. On noticing these gaps, students would ask questions to secure information to fill the gaps. TB's detailed instructions therefore functioned as a trellis that students first used to identify gaps with, and then hook their questions on.
- Upon realising how particular TB was regarding what she wanted done, students would question simply to demonstrate that they too were particular about how they executed task instructions. Class B students were therefore projecting the right image, adopting a 'good learner' role in response to TB's role. They asked confirmation questions (where the answers may already have been known) to project themselves as students who were keen to please the teacher.
- Class B students had the necessary linguistic proficiency and social confidence to ask questions. The class was after all composed of academic achievers. These students knew that knowing the rules of the classroom game is the key to success, and when unsure, they confidently teased out these rules.

All of the above resulted in students adopting a "*first ask, then do*" approach. This meant that the resulting microculture was one that generally encouraged student questions, and consequently, clarity on the students' part regarding what they had to do.



Apart from handling student questions thoroughly, TB actively encouraged students to improve their English through reading (by nurturing a reading habit) and speaking English in class. She advised students on more careful time management now that they were in Secondary school and had more subjects to cope with (see discussion of LB1 in 6.4.7). She encouraged a competitive spirit by repeatedly comparing them with Class A students, thereby motivating students to push themselves (if only to outdo their rivals).

She effectively built rapport with her class by displaying understanding and flexibility: students who had good reasons were excused for not doing homework (see B.CP.4). This was an immediate hit with students who were so impressed with her compassion that one declared her *"the best teacher in the world!"* (line 144).

Another interesting means of rapport building was the way in which TB put herself and students in the same team. She told students to record assignment details accurately in the Contents Page so that the HOD and Principal would be pleased with both her and them (students). In another instance, she encouraged students to put more effort into their assignments, so that they would do well at school, and make their parents proud (B.CP.4). In both cases, teacher and students are positioned as team players, collectively working to please the HOD, the Principal, and parents. As team players working towards the same goals, it is important that they work in a class atmosphere with harmony, co-operation and mutual respect.

### **8.5.2. How Constituent Parts relate to Class D's Microculture**

In 8.3.3.3, the point was made that in early lessons, TD did not explicitly set up participation structure. Her approach was to teach first, and set up class rules when students violated them. She reacted with corrective measures by referring to the violated class rule and then punishing the offending student. Rarely did she present an explanation as to why class rules should be adhered to. On one occasion when a student who was being punished explained to TD that he was speaking in Malay with his classmate only because the classmate had first asked him a question, TD's response was *"I caught you, so too bad"* (D.CM.1, line 8). Such reasoning lacks the sense of fair play needed to encourage students to respect rules. With this, TD conveyed to students that class rules were breakable so long as student could get away with it.

TD was rigorous in her attention to classroom order. A strong believer in classroom discipline, and how good language learners must *"first and foremost be disciplined"* (8.3.1) she spent much of lesson time enforcing law and order. The term law and order describes TD's discourse aptly as she frequently threatened and policed students. In several lessons, TD began lessons by referring to student diaries, and other homework, threatening students that:

- T     those of you who owe me things, put it on my table before I come after you.  
T     you better own up now. If I catch you, your punishment will be double.  
T     are all diaries in? If not, you better tell me now.

Lessons often began with such policing requests, which because they were stern and often accompanied by punishment, set a serious tone for the lesson that followed. TD's approach made sure that students were quiet and focused on the lesson before any teaching began. This approach was particularly apparent in earlier lessons, and in her interview (8.3.1), she explained that

*"When I first went in – well, first of all I'm just not used to handling small kids. And then when I saw them talking away – I am just not used to this kind of behaviour. So my number one problem with this class is discipline because with my classes when I walk in means 'you shut up'"*

According to TD, her **'first discipline, then teach'** approach (Appel, 1995) was a response to a perceived problem. And because it resulted in students becoming quieter, it was, for her purposes, an effective approach. There were numerous instances in lessons when students sat silently instead of seeking clarification. Yet, in interview and questionnaire data, they complained only minimally of her strictness. They did however say that they would clarify with classmates instead of ask the teacher, and also said that they would not dare ask their strict Maths teacher questions for fear of being scolded. In being strict, TD was less approachable, particularly to students of low language proficiency and low social confidence. Her strict behaviour did not encourage student questions.

Yet, student punishment was not always successful in altering student behaviour. Although students were punished for not handing in their diaries (D.CM.5), a later lesson (D.CM.6) saw just as many students still not submitting their diaries. They also continued to speak (and mostly in Malay) during teacher-talk.

Yet, their disregard of class rules and her instructions did not come across as a rebellion against her authority. Students have the power to resist the teacher's authority by withholding learning, through perhaps causing interactional sabotage during lessons. Failure to do homework or talking during teacher-talk could be viewed as instances of interactional sabotage. Students who *choose* not to clarify teacher instructions could be perceived as covertly resisting learning. This may be one way of perceiving why Class D students hardly question. I do not however see these students as challenging TD's dominance by attempting interactional sabotage.

Reprimands and punishments often had a temporary effect, requiring TD to issue them repeatedly. There are several possible causes of such management problems. In some instances, students were uncooperative because they did not seem motivated enough, often because the point of an activity had not been clearly made (see LD2 and LD4). TD, for example, had not explained the purpose of writing weekly diary entries. For the first entry (D.TI.1), students were forced to write anything on the topic, as long as it was twelve lines in length. There was no build up of interest, and no explanation of purpose. When told to write book reviews once again, unlike TB, TD did not whet student appetite for the task with interesting book review worksheets, nor did she urge students to cultivate the reading habit. Instead, she explained matter-of-factly that reviews would enable her to detect if students had really read the book (see discussion in D.TI.4).

TD's decision to invest little time and effort in preparatory work (she told me at our first meeting, see 4.4.1:90, and again during our interview, that she would instead focus on her Secondary four classes) meant that lesson plans were based solely on the textbook, and were thus predictable, uninspiring and devoid of personal preparation. Also, as the lessons frequently proceeded at a pace aimed for older and more capable students (that TD was used to), tasks were sometimes too difficult for Class D students. It did not help that instructions were frequently basic and minimal, and did not specify, elaborate, or display with examples. The result was that students knew it was important that they follow procedure, but did not know exactly what procedure was.

A teacher's tendency to control classroom interaction, thereby restricting student behaviour to routinised interaction patterns can prompt student boredom and the ensuing lapse of students into non-attentive behaviour. When students were non-attentive, TD issued severe reprimands that were often delivered in a raised voice, revealing her annoyance and anger (see 7.4.2). Her disapproval of student misbehaviour was transparent and often entailed the

use of harsh criticism. Her management of misbehaviour reflected attempts to establish and maintain a strong disciplinarian role. In these episodes, TD displayed low levels of tolerance and was quick to express irritation, or to punish a misbehaving student (see 7.4.2). She appeared to be locked into the habitual rhythm of authoritarian control: she seemed to assume that deviant behaviour must be subdued on the spot, and by doing so, she placed herself in a vicious circle as she had to reprimand her students repeatedly. This invariably disrupted the flow of the lesson activity (see Extract D.TI.5) and provoked further misbehaviour, which compelled her to be even more explicit in reprimands and punishment, rendering her teaching less efficient.

The failure of students to execute tasks as desired indicated a lack of teacher-student rapport and collaboration. High on TD's agenda was apparently control, inherent in classroom proceedings, both in determining students' output and checking social behaviour. Humour was rarely present, and observations led me to the conclusion that the atmosphere was frequently marked by confusion and restlessness, miscommunications and interruptions. All of this led to a classroom atmosphere that did not encourage learning.

## **8.6. Class B and Class D Microcultures: A summary overview**

The microculture of the classroom reflects the social relationships of members of a class, revealing how these relationships affect developments in the classroom. It permeates everything that happens within the classroom, and is in turn influenced by much of what happens there (Allwright 1984). It is important that lessons create a classroom climate that contributes positively to the learning experience (Pierce, 1995a). This includes establishing mutually acceptable rules of conduct, maintaining open channels of communication, establishing a friendly atmosphere, showing sensitivity, care and respect towards students, and providing them with constant feedback about their performance.

The microculture in Class B was warm with students unafraid to clarify and confirm when in doubt. Their actions and reactions did not appear suppressed, and they reacted openly and freely. TB installed mutually acceptable rules of conduct, and allowed students to influence the shape of the lesson through a democratic voting system, through their questions and suggestions. Students and teacher co-constructed the classroom microculture, and

consequently, students had ownership over this culture. As co-constructors, they were more likely to act as cultural gatekeepers, or custodians, keeping the system intact.

TB made her teaching agenda more transparent: through the way she systematically set up ATS and SPS and through her advice to students. She told them what they had to do to improve their English; how they had to practice time-management for their Secondary education; how they had to obey instructions and do their work neatly - because the system rewards such behaviour. Consequently, students had less to decode, and could participate in their learning more effectively. Interestingly the clear framework within which lessons occurred was manifested in the orderly arrangement of furniture, neatly decorated notice boards, and even the poster which declared:

*"Remember to do your duties! It is important. Follow all Instructions!"*(see 6.2).

There was generally within the class group, a positive cohesiveness and stability. Perhaps more importantly, was a mutual expectation that the two parties took their teaching and learning responsibilities seriously. Such a classroom climate facilitated lesson procedure, and learning.

The microculture in Class D was, on the other hand, tense with students frequently unsure and restless, and their teacher agitated and frustrated. Students were suppressed under tight teacher-control, and often did not question when in doubt. In such a culture, little room was made for the learners' initiative, which is important for effective participation in the lesson. Van Lier's words are particularly apt when he cautions that as dominant as a teacher may be, s/he cannot guarantee learning, and that the reality is that teaching is the subservient activity, accountable entirely to its effect on learning:

"We must always remember that teaching never causes learning, but rather creates (or fails to create) the conditions in which learning can occur." van Lier (1988:32)

Class D students had minimal influence over lesson procedure, and were not co-constructors of their classroom experience. There was no establishing of mutually acceptable rules of conduct, and no maintaining of open channels of communication. Students were keen to learn, to follow instructions, and to please, but had to operate within a microculture that did not promote a positive climate for learning.

TD did not set up a clear framework for students to work within. Consequently, they had more to decode, more invisible obstacles to overcome as they negotiated the lesson and their learning. Once again, this under-defined or outlined lesson framework was manifested in the disorderly arrangement of furniture, the haphazardly and shabbily decorated notice boards, and the duty roster poster which having fallen off, lay unattended on the floor (see 6.2).

These microcultures show how learning can be promoted or deterred. While TB encouraged and socialised students to acquire behavioural traits that would promote English learning, TD did not. TB advocated an educational philosophy in which mutual respect and shared responsibility were as important as maintaining order and displaying leadership. She provided her students with strong internal socialisation (Allwright 1996), and by actively teaching them to be good learners (i.e. *"how to learn how to learn"*, van Lier 1988:55), she equipped them to achieve academic success. Her teaching involved nurturing and socialising students for success.

TD, by contrast, had low expectations of her students: she expected them to cheat in their book reviews; she frequently assumed they had not all handed in their homework, and that inter-student communication was usually not task related. Students eventually learn the norms of appropriate communicative behaviour in the classroom based on their experiences with their teachers. Barnes (1976:33) holds that the teacher's question, the tone of voice, gestures, and stance, the way s/he receives students' replies - the whole of his/her behaviour - affirms and reaffirms what uses of language s/he expects from students. I would expand Barnes' comment to say that the whole of the teacher's behaviour affirms and reaffirms her expectations of students.

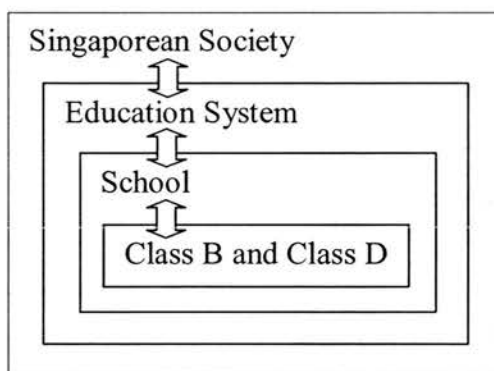
By teaching and managing their classes in different ways, the teachers constrained the range of actions that were appropriate and reasonable for students to respond with. Students however also managed classroom interaction through their behaviour which constrained the range of action choices that made sense for their teacher to consider selecting. Class B students displayed more competent membership, participating effectively in the flow of the lesson as they creatively manipulated the lesson (mostly through student questions) to increase their opportunities for learning. By not seeking clarification, Class D students decreased their opportunities for learning, and made it easier and more likely that TD controlled the lesson. In both classes, students played a collaborative part in structuring their classroom environment in which they learned and displayed what they had or had not



learned. However, Class B students seem to have played a stronger part in constructing their lessons than did Class D students, possibly because they were allowed to by TB, but also because they were more confident learners. They came across as more competent learners with more competent membership to their classroom culture. Class D students came across as less competent learners, because they were less confident learners, but also because TD's teaching style prevented learners from contributing more actively to the co-construction of classroom culture. So, while English lessons in Class B socialised students into, and for, academic success, in Class D lessons, students were socialised into academic failure.

## 8.7. Levels of Influence: Macro explanations for microcultures

As discussed in Chapter Two, microethnography explores how local microcultures relate to macro ones as teachers and students conduct the social action of the lesson together (Erickson 1982). Classroom interaction is therefore viewed as encased in multi-levels. The discussion now considers links of influence between on the one hand the two microcultures studied and on the other, the macrocultures of the school, the education system and Singapore society at large (Figure 8.1). In various ways, some similar and others different, Class B and Class D microcultures mirror traits found in these larger macrocultures. The discussion considers links of influence across the three levels of culture as follows:



**Figure 8.1: Levels of Influence across Micro and Macrocultures**



### **8.7.1. Education System and Society**

Chapter Five explained the ways in which the Singapore education system embodies how on the one hand a society and its problems relate to on the other hand, a government and its solutions. This education system is perceived as playing the dual function of ‘solution’ and ‘tool’. As the first, it is a response by political leaders to specific socio-economic problems, and as the second, it is a means to socio-economic goals.

Singapore society upholds respect for authority, discipline, hard work and success. The society’s strong accent on excellence (see 5.9) manifests itself in the education system, producing students who are generally achievement motivated, and competitive. The average Singaporean is also docile and law-abiding and this squares with findings (Pang and Lim, 1997) that local classrooms teach students docility, obedience to authority and acceptance of hierarchy (see 5.9). These descriptions hold true for Class B and D microcultures, illustrating the close and strong link between broad cultural influences of larger society and local classroom culture. The education system (principals and teacher), and the families of students, act as agents of socialisation, building and sustaining the link between micro and macro cultures.

This politically engineered fit between national and classroom culture works to keep education and society, and education and economy well synchronised. The school system supplies what the state needs by turning out well-qualified, hardworking, success-oriented, disciplined and law-abiding citizens who can continue to fuel and drive the economy. This aside, Singaporeans faring well in international student ratings (see Chapter 5.9) has also brought the system much foreign interest. On a general level, and as far as the eye can see, the educational system promotes high academic achievement and social cohesion. How does this apply to School-X, and to the two classes? Although not an aim of this study, the analysis of microcultures allows me to explore the functionality or dysfunctionality between education policy and reality.

### **8.7.2. Education System and School-X**

The Principal described School-X as a “*no choice*” school as many of its students end up at the school through no choice of their own (see 5.13). They generally hail from, in the HOD’s

words, the *"bottom of the pile"*: i.e. the bottom 5% of the PSLE cohort. The school itself is regularly described by students and teachers as old and rundown.

As the no choice, rundown school with the bottom of the pile students, School-X is atypical of Singaporean secondary schools. Its students generally come from low-income families, and unstable homes. They often have to work after school to supplement the family income. According to the Principal, it is difficult to overcome the fact that the school is sent low calibre students. Yet, School-X students are not dissimilar from more mainstream students. They are generally described by their teachers as obedient (discipline is not a problem), and attentive during lessons (Chapter 5.12). They do however seem to understand and assimilate knowledge at a slower pace, and they are often difficult to motivate. They seem to have a low sense of self-esteem, probably because (according to teachers) they do not perform well.

When commenting on School-X teachers, the HOD said that they were not generally keen to attend in-service training courses as these were *"time consuming"*. When he tried to send some of his English teachers for courses, they seemed *"too bogged down"*, and unwilling because the general sentiment was that the *"the more courses you attend, the more responsibilities you will be later made to take on"* (see 5.15). In short, these teachers did not want to upgrade their professional knowledge and skills. Unlike their mainstream counterparts, these teachers were not achievement motivated, or keen to keep abreast with teaching methodology. Perhaps this apathy explains a Science teacher's reaction to my being given access to the School-X classrooms for research: during a conversation in the canteen this teacher asked me why I was doing research when, according to him, there was really little, if anything, to be gained from classroom research. He was annoyed with the Principal for having allowed me to do fieldwork in the school because I would cause nothing but disruption to classes and teachers. Although bold and confrontational, I found his comments interesting as they supported what the HOD had earlier said about his unprogressive-minded staff.

When commenting on the quality of his teachers, the Principal lamented that he was never allowed to select his own teachers. He explained how every year, the *"special"* principals get to pick and choose staff from the cohort of newly trained teachers (see 5.13). These principals come from the top schools – and in this way, *"better schools get better teachers"*. This was indeed true of my experience. Upon completing teacher training, I submitted to the Ministry of Education a list of schools that I wanted to teach at. I was posted not to any

school on my list, but to a Special Assistance Plan school because the Principal had asked for me. I had no choice in my posting. The Principal of School-X added that *"people like us have no say, the Ministry posts us teachers who are often too old to teach restless students who need motivating"*.

According to the HOD, *"nobody - not even these students - wants to fail"*. However, given the quality of School-X students and teachers, and the reality of what is therefore achievable, teachers equip students with *"some education, (and) give them dignity"*. This then is the lot of School-X students – to receive some education and dignity.

Since independence, a key tenet of Singapore's education system is that through meritocracy, it promotes equality of opportunity, and contributes to social cohesion. Whilst early educational efforts unified the education system, more recent efforts, have worked towards increasing differentiation, and towards maximising the potential of the academic elite (Gomez, 1997). The 'excellence in education' ethic has produced a system which gives so much to a select few, some to the majority, but little to bottom-end schools and bottom-of-the-pile students. This results in problems associated with inequality of opportunity and performance (see 5.10.1 and 5.10.2).

Research shows that inequalities persist for different socio-economic categories and ethnic groups (Quah et. al. 1997). Education has over the four decades, brought Singaporeans economic success, but has not succeeded in eroding the vertical cleavages of race, language, religion and culture to bring about integration. The operation of a meritocratic education system has not erased the power of home and ethnicity variables, and has instead reinforced social and educational inequalities. This corresponds with how School-X students mostly come from lower income families, where parents have had little education. They arrive at School-X as *"low quality"* students in secondary one, and go on to perform below the national average at the next national exams. Unsurprisingly, students go on to live their parents' lives. The school reproduces the social and political structure.

There is today an open acknowledgement amongst the educational authorities of the general underachievement amongst the minorities. School-X is an underachieving school. According to the Principal, that its student population is 55% Malay – high above the population percentage of 14% - has much to do with it. The Malay population has long been identified as an under-performing minority group – they constitute the majority of drop-outs (see

Chapter 5.10.2). According to the Principal, with such a high Malay population, there is a subsequent perception amongst some Singaporeans that School-X is a Malay-medium school, making it an unattractive choice for students (student interview and questionnaire data). Within the school itself, the tail-end classes have more Malays. Thus, while Chinese students accumulate in top-end classes, the Malays dominate tail-end classes.

This resulting polarisation of the better and the less-endowed students into different schools, as well as within the same school across the different academic streams, works in tandem with a polarisation of students along ethnic lines. Thus, it seems that whilst post-independent Singapore worked actively towards 'de-ethnicisation', today's education system gravitates towards 're-ethnicisation' (Gomez 1997).

Yet, a group of students defined by their ethnicity, consistently under-performing in a system, suggests that these students are in a system that does not succeed in educating them as well as it does their classmates. That they do not do well can be explained by drawing on the 'home-school difference' theory (Heath, 1983) and Bourdieu's (1984) 'cultural and linguistic capital' theory. Educational wastage is perhaps a realistic expectation in a mass democratic system where the provision of equal access for all is bound to throw up a wide range of pedagogical and social needs arising from the diversified nature of any single cohort of Singaporean students. Yet, educational wastage even if it involves students from one ethnic group surely deserves more of the systems attention and efforts. The 'excellence in education' ethic needs to stretch itself to all corners of the education system to encompass the under-performers (more will be said on this in the chapter that follows).

### ***8.7.3. Explaining Microcultures from a Macro Perspective***

Knowing how School-X is located within the education system, the microcultures of Class B and Class D can be explained from a macro perspective. These microcultures mirror, to different extents, the culture of the school.

In my encounters in School-X, discipline was observed as part of what the school teaches. Not just as a pre-requisite for education, it was an end in itself. The percentage of total effort of School-X staff consumed by discipline was large - not only because students were careless or unruly, but because teachers, students and the larger community expected order and obedience to be taught. My observations of lessons, morning assembly and weekly

assemblies suggest that staff generally believed that they could not effectively teach students docility and respect without threats, without unending repetition of rules, and without immediate confrontation of misbehaviour. TD, for example, displayed an orientation to governance more than to teaching, spending much effort on quieting the class, and once explained to me the importance of beginning the lesson by first establishing an aura of discipline. It also seemed that good behaviour was as important as acknowledging authority. When I presented this during canteen conversations with teachers, they supported my observations by narrating instances of their own encounters with students. Given this, the management of order and control in Class D appeared (unlike in Class B) to be more consistent with the school's approach towards discipline.

In both classes, the general keenness of students to please their teachers, to fall in line once reprimanded, to be driven to achieve when marks or grades were at stake are all behaviour patterns that reflect culture-specific norms – norms which correspond with those of School-X (see 5.16.3), and with Singapore society's communitarianism described in Chapter 5.7. In both classes, particularly in Class D, the group was more important than the individual, and symptomatic of this was the importance placed on the numerous and specific rules used to bring stability and order. The strong focus on discipline is consistent across all levels: in the many laws that Singapore society has just to keep the canoe from capsizing (see 5.7); in School-X's strong emphasis on rules (School Diary, the discipline masters's constant attention to law and order); and in both classes, particularly in Class D.

To a certain extent, the nature and character of students in each class, their confidence (or lack of) in asking questions, their linguistic competence in being able to frame questions, the fact that one class is Express and the other Normal Technical, all of these together shaped each class's microculture.

However, as discussed earlier, the teachers seemed to be the main determinants of their microculture. What they put into place, their students enacted. They entered their respective classes with expectations of what their students would be like. For TD, *"When I first heard Normal Tec, I was expecting something worse... but I think I can handle them, I can manage them"*. Luckily for her, expectations were not met with reality. TB, having notched up 20 years of lower secondary teaching, knew her students even without meeting them. Her lessons were pitched right, students seemed comfortable with their pace, instructions were

phrased in comprehensible language, and covered the amount of detail students seemed to need.

Given that the teachers were the major players in the co-construction of microculture, each class's microculture began to take form *not* when teachers first met with students, but when teachers were allocated to their respective classes. Microethnography recognises social reality as the driving force behind participants' classroom behaviour. That TD was allocated the most needy, challenging and demanding class, despite being new to the school, to the level, and the stream, (she had taught lower secondary students once in her fourteen year teaching career) makes a clear statement on social reality in the school. This reality mirrors that of the general education system. That the worst class is assigned the most ill equipped teacher is an everyday fact in a system that spotlights excellence. Class B was allocated the best teacher, and Class D was given what was left. This was unfortunate for Class D, and also for TD herself, who finding it all too much, was, after five weeks of school, contemplating resigning from her post (see 8.3.1.2). It is interesting to contemplate the microculture that would have evolved had TB been allocated Class D - this would of course only have happened in an ideal world.

## **8.8. Summary**

The chapter began with the assembly of collages depicting each class's microculture. In order to understand and explain these microcultures and their similarities and differences, I drew on interview and questionnaire data to compose teacher and student frames of references. These frames were used in conjunction with analytical concepts drawn from field to understand teacher and student behaviour, and microcultures. Microcultures were then explained from a macrocultural point of view as I explored how what happens in the classrooms links with what happens in larger society.

Data analysis was mainly through direct interpretation. Findings were modified by repeated thinking, triangulated by multiple methods, and a deliberate search for disconfirming evidence. Findings indicate that both classrooms share similar cultural traits, and that these traits mirror the macro aspects of the classroom, i.e. the culture of the school, the education system, and Singapore society at large.



More interesting and unexpected however, are findings that point at variations across microcultures. Differences in microcultures seem to be attributable, to an extent at least, to the different roles played by the teachers in their attention to classroom procedure, style of classroom management, and delivery of instructions. A significant and striking difference between these microcultures is manifested in the different student questioning behaviour that obtains in each classroom. In exploring the relationship between classroom discourse (and action) and the evolving microculture, this study has captured an insider's view of how, in one class, there is the socialisation of academic success, and in the other, there is the socialisation of failure. Chapter Nine addresses the implications of these findings, and the recommendations that stem from these implications.





## **Chapter 9. Implications, Recommendations and Conclusion**

### **9.1. Introduction**

Educational research aims to make contributions to general theory about educational processes, to educational practice, and to the planning of further investigative activity (Sowden and Keeves 1988:526). This chapter deals with each in turn, followed by a discussion of the limitations of the study and a conclusion which draws the thesis to a close.

### **9.2. Research Contributions to Theory about Educational Processes**

Although the initial plan was to locate this study in a typical, average, Singaporean secondary school, it was, I believe, to my benefit that circumstances eventually led me to an atypical 'no-choice' school. In a wider education culture that focuses much of its resources and energies on nurturing and cultivating the best, tail-end schools invariably receive little attention. Upon negotiating access to School-X where there were three academic streams in secondary one, I opted to observe the differences in classroom microculture across two stratification levels (see 4.4). I hoped to study the effect (if any) of streaming on the co-construction of microculture: i.e. would classes in different academic streams evolve different cultures? However, given that secondary one in School-X is made up of only four classes spanning three streams, I expected to encounter more similarities than differences between the microcultures of Class D and Class B. If there were differences, I expected them to be minimal. This was not so.

Findings show that these classrooms are microcosms of society; microcultures mirror the culture of the education system and that of general society. Findings also show that while teachers and students do co-construct the classroom culture, the teachers in this study played a far more significant role in determining the nature and tone of the resulting microculture. Through discourse and action, stemming from training, past experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations, these teachers generated microcultures that in one class promoted and in the second deterred learning.

This said, the contributions to theory about educational processes that this study makes are with regard to the role of the teacher as key player in the co-construction of classroom culture. As key player, the teacher is instrumental in setting-up microcultures that encourage learning. However, exactly how s/he does this, and exactly what kind of culture is viewed as promoting learning are largely culture specific.

Stake (1995:92) defines teaching as:

“the arrangement of opportunities for learners to follow a natural human inclination to become educated”.

By this, Stake means that learners have a natural tendency to become more aware, involved, proficient, more commanding in certain skills and knowledge which appeal to them. Teaching involves two prior considerations: the selection of information and/or skills needed, and the recognition of conditions that will facilitate learning for learners individually and collectively. Teacher training generally addresses these, equipping trainee teachers with the necessary skills, but on a lesson to lesson basis, and during lessons, it is student questions that allow a teacher to find out or gauge the conditions that facilitate his/her students learning.

“If we consider that learners’ questions are data that are, as a rule, cognitive, conscious, based on reflection, not artificially elicited, guided to a high degree by interest, consciously communicated, and controlled by the learner, then we can assume that questions constitute data of particular potential relevance and importance for a variety of important issues within interlanguage and cross-linguistic research.” Raabe 1986:12

Whilst agreeing with Raabe, this study reveals that student questions are particularly relevant and important not just for interlanguage and cross linguistic research. Questions provide the teacher with vital clues and feedback regarding what learners already know, or need to know, or are interested in, or don’t understand, or unsure about. These questions also provide the teacher with valuable feedback on the appropriacy of methodology, lesson pace, and lesson content. Education theory has long championed learner-centred teaching. And the one real means through which learners can aid or service their own learning is through learner questions. It follows that a classroom that encourages and supports learner questions is better able to address learner needs, and is therefore more learner-centred. In displaying the

significance of learner questions to effective teaching, the study informs educational theory of the vital importance of cultivating microcultures (like Class B's) that promote such questions.

### **9.3. Research Contributions to Educational Practice**

Within national education policy, Singapore's official blueprint of multilingualism and bilingualism are aimed specifically at producing (and reproducing) the goals and intentions of what has been ideologically defined as pragmatism (see Chua 1985; Vasil 1984). As an ideological system, pragmatism is all the more subtle because policies are regularly made and explained as hard-headed choices which may seem unfavourable at a particular time, but which necessarily work to achieve societal efficiency and are for the common good. In turn, these common-sensical policy implementations often do yield the promised goods (as with Singapore's social and economic successes) and thus have a way of justifying themselves to such an extent that they detract from the less than positive dimensions of the policies (Tan 1998).

These less than positive dimensions of education policy are the heavy emphasis on excellence and the ensuing elitist culture, and the culture of intense competition which gives the limelight to those ahead in the race, while neglecting the slower and less well-endowed. Streaming has resulted in racial segregation – with Chinese students collecting in top-end classes, and Malay students in the bottom-end ones. As a country which has as its only resources, its people, Singapore cannot afford not to address this problem, for in the long-term, what is at stake is the system's weakened commitment and contribution to societal cohesion and collaboration.

This said, the government admits the disparity in educational achievement along ethnic lines, and has reacted by helping to set-up two organisations, Mendaki (for the Malays) and Sinda (for the Indians), which provide students extra academic support in the form of evening and weekend classes. This puts the onus of improving student performance on the respective communities, implying that the education system itself is not accountable for the poor performance of minority groups.

Yet, a student's performance in school and the school's (or teacher's) assessment of this performance are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping. As one influences the another, it could be said that the student's assessed ability is a product of his/her social situation. Instead of being an attribute of that student, it is socially constructed (see 3.4.3 ). Thus, to tackle minority under-performance more successfully with a two-pronged approach, the education system should look within itself for answers as to how it can educate more effectively *all* of Singapore's ethnic groups. Now that the authorities openly acknowledge a relationship between ethnicity and educational attainment, they ought to adopt greater responsibility by considering issues pertaining to the nature of educational input (the composition, nature and background of the student cohort), and the quality of the educational process itself. Teachers should receive training that prepares them to teach multicultural, multi-lingual classes. Such training would educate teachers on how student cultures vary – even on a small island like Singapore, and better prepare teachers to motivate and teach students from different ethnic and socio-economic groups.

In its drive to unite the different ethnic groups, the school system has up-held meritocracy. In treating all students as though they were the same, the system has downplayed student differences along ethnic lines. Such 'white-washing' of differences has not been effective. The education system is based on Confucianist values – which is the cultural heritage of the Chinese. In treating all students as though they were just the same, the system has seen student performance vary with ethnicity. To tackle this problem, the system should address the ethnicity and culture of its students as it seeks educational solutions.

#### **9.4. Recommendations**

One of the main concerns of this study has been to make it useful. Critical researchers believe that the goal of educational research is educational and social change (Pierce 1995b in 3.5.2). I embarked on this project with the broad goal of studying classroom microculture, but during the process of the study, framed more context-specific research questions that eventually related to issues of inequalities of educational performance and opportunity. There are many possibilities for reducing inequalities in education in particular and society in general. How can information derived from this study be used to put forward concrete recommendations that could constitute an appropriate course of action? Instead of presenting an ambitious inventory of recommendations, I adopt a real-world, culturally-aware approach.

### **9.4.1. Preparing Teachers for Different Streams**

By studying how the microcultures evolved such that one encouraged learning and the other deterred it, the study captures an insider's view of how social tracking and social exclusion operate. Upon being channelled into the Normal stream in secondary one, a student has four years to prepare for the "N" level examination at the end of the fourth year. Depending on performance at this exam, students can choose to continue another year to prepare for the "O" level examination. However, in reality *"a large proportion of Normal stream pupils do not do well enough to go on to polytechnics or junior colleges"* (Lee, 1996). This means that at the end of primary six, with the PSLE examinations, students are channelled into streams that, to a large extent, define the rest of their education possibilities, and determine their life chances. Viewed in this way, streaming leads to social exclusion.

Yet, when streaming was proposed in the Goh Report in 1979, it was justified on the basis of its ability

"... to provide an opportunity for less capable pupils to develop at a pace slower than for the more capable pupils."

The officials argued that:

"... it would allow a child every opportunity to go as far as he can."

The official blueprint says that the Normal Technical curriculum is geared towards strengthening pupils' proficiency in English and Mathematics. Yet, this goal becomes less achievable when ill-equipped teachers are assigned to teach this stream. TD was not an appropriate choice to teach Class D as many of the lesson hiccups showed. If there must be streaming within the system, then the MOE must allocate more effort to the education of Normal stream students. The role of English is particularly relevant here for by definition, most pupils of this stream have a poor grasp of the language. Given that English is the medium of instruction, this has a knock-on effect on how much or little pupils benefit from education. This makes it all the more vital for these students to have motivating and competent English instruction. To deny them this is to deny them education.

Teacher training must constructively prepare trainee teachers to motivate, manage and teach students of different streams, and this preparation must include more than basic theoretical knowledge. A great deal is and can only be learnt by doing. Training should include school attachments where trainees learn to manage and teach different ability students. The aim is to develop in teachers the sensitivity, skills and knowledge that enable them to operate effectively – according to the specific needs of their students.

In a culture where the focus of attention is on the best, there is little interest in the non-performers, and a general reluctance on teachers' part to teach Normal Technical students. This was seen in TD's initial reactions to having to teach Class D. There is little fame or glory associated with teaching these students. In my opinion, the system stands to gain from cultivating an educational culture where motivated and dynamic teachers are assigned to teach these students. Teachers who turn-in good results with these 'no-gooders' should be rewarded by the system. This reward could vary from media coverage (usually reserved for top performing students and their teachers) to peer recognition within and across schools.

There should be in-service training, which brings these teachers together, introducing them to new ideas, and acquainting them with relevant language teaching literature. Such training should also motivate teachers by inviting them to exchange ideas, opinions, and even material, as well as stimulate critical discussion. These should be two-way sessions – as teachers can be sourced for their opinions regarding materials design and evaluation, so that the body that produces textbooks for these students are better informed on what works and what does not.

Being on the edges of the education system, Normal Technical teachers and students are a marginalised lot. In a system that focuses on excellence, the practice of allocating less experienced or weaker teachers to lower achieving schools and the lower academic streams is a common one. The educational culture associated with these schools, teachers and students is one of low expectations. The profile of these schools, teachers and schools can only be raised if the system itself makes a huge and far-reaching effort. The recommendations suggested above aim to address this by bringing positive attention to, and raising the profile of Normal Technical teachers and students.



### **9.4.2. Teachers as ‘Socialisers’**

In the context of compulsory schooling in state school systems, socialisation is a normal part of the teacher’s role. The teacher is legally in loco parentis, and may be officially expected by society both to socialise learners into the immediate environment, and simultaneously to play a major role in socialising learners into the wider society outside of, and subsequent to, the compulsory school system itself (Allwright 1996:212). It is important that teachers are educated to recognise that it is their responsibility to try to help learners learn by establishing some form of effective learning group in the class. Teacher training must make teachers aware that even though students may not learn all they are taught, they learn considerably more than they are taught. They learn the priorities of the authorities, the degree to which different errors are tolerated, the extent to which they can control the flow and direction of a lesson through questions, etc. The competent teacher anticipates this learning, and in appreciating its important role in determining how much (of what they are actively taught) students do learn, the teacher facilitates this learning.

All of this relates to the nature and quality of classroom culture. The more care that is taken in the setting-up of culture, the more concretely it is done, the more transparent the culture, the clearer the ATS and SPS, the more effectively it will serve teachers and students as a clear structure within which they can carry out teaching and learning. As potential key players in the co-construction of classroom culture, teachers must realise that their actions and words, their attitude and expectations are very important in the process of classroom culture construction.

### **9.4.3. Teaching Students (how) to Ask Questions**

To a large extent, students ask questions only when they perceive a real platform for question asking. This platform has to be installed by the teacher - through how she allows students to ask questions, and how she treats these questions – whether she ignores them or answers them, and how she answers them. Teachers frequently say “*Any questions?*” before moving on with the lesson. This is not enough. There has to be sufficient wait-time for students to mentally phrase questions, or so that they can gather the courage to ask questions. The latter means that the classroom culture should make student feel ‘safe’ enough to question, such that student questions and teacher answers become naturalised discourses.

routines. Teachers also need to look carefully at what their learners are saying to each other: learners frequently seek clarification amongst themselves, and so tuning in this can be instructive for the teacher.

This assumes that students have the linguistic competence to ask (themselves or the teacher) questions. When they do not – as may well be the case with Class D students, teachers should provide appropriate ‘learner training’ which teaches students how to phrase questions, when to ask questions, and even the kinds of questions they could ask. Questions may be grammar related, or about semantics; they may be interlanguage or cross-linguistic questions; or they may seek clarifications or confirmations. In order to generate for themselves more feedback and clues for their teaching, teachers need to impart to students the importance of student questions, teaching them how to use questions to service their learning. This is an aspect of learner training which has not received much attention. When seen in the larger context of, teaching learners how to question (and the skills involved in question asking) empowers learners to take responsibility for their learning. Teachers would themselves need to be trained to provide such learner training.

#### **9.4.4. *Teacher Instructions***

Another recommendation that stems from the study is the importance of clear teacher instructions. The study showed how unclear task instructions hindered the lesson procedure. They got in the way of learning and was frustrating to both teacher and students for the distractions they caused, and the time and energy they wasted. Some instructions – regarding how students have to present their work, how they have to do assignment corrections etc., should be made crystal clear at the start of the school year and set-up as lesson routines. Teachers must not forget that they need to spell out exactly what they want done, and present these systematically so that students are not left in doubt and can get on with the task itself. This should be incorporated into teacher training.

#### **9.4.5. *Classroom Management***

Both teachers valued order over chaos. In installing order, they adopted different classroom management styles. As strict as TD was, and as much as she reprimanded and punished, her management style was not particularly effective. For all the disruptions they caused, the style

worked against efficient teaching. Yet TB spent less time and energy on discipline, and was more effective in keeping order and maintaining learner interest. TB generated and maintained learner interest and motivated learners to perform and therefore kept order. This then begs the question of how effective strong discipline is as a motivator? As the microculture in Class D showed, strong discipline seems to discourage student motivation and enthusiasm to learn. Perhaps TB's style would not have been as effective in Class D. What we do know though is that TD's management style did not help her to teach nor her students to learn. Teachers need to think long and hard about the management style they want to practice, depending of course on the nature of their students.

#### **9.4.6. Using only English in Class**

The final recommendation concerns the class rule of having to use only English during English lessons. Classroom observations suggest that it is not entirely obvious that English is the appropriate language medium in Class D. With regard to speaking only English in class, in a typical language classroom, it is commonly believed that every time a student makes a request or gives a reply, expresses a reaction or simply thinks aloud in the mother tongue, an opportunity is missed for the student to hear, speak, read or write the target language. The ideal in the second language classroom is that teachers and students use the target language for real communication as well as for formal language instruction. This though is possible only if students are competent enough, and desirable only if students can attend to their social needs in the second language.

Students can acquire competent membership in the classroom only when they have the necessary social and linguistic competence. By not being allowed to use Malay in Class D, they may not be able to express what they mean or ask what they do not understand. This 'speak only English' rule is regularly broken, and students are regularly punished. In Class D, it is interesting that discipline in a language class stemmed from students using Malay. They say that although they would like to speak only English, they sometimes lack the linguistic competence to do so. It is clear that, at times, they need to express themselves in Malay. To not allow them to do so is effectively, to deny them access or membership to the lesson, and to relegate them to the peripheries of the classroom experience. In creating an effective learning group, teachers must nurture a sense of membership to the group through rules that students *can* abide by. By abiding by rules, students invest personally in the class group and their learning. In the case of students with low levels of competence in English,

*some* first language must be allowed and even encouraged. Teachers should not only allow code-switching, but should also be encouraged to code-switch during lessons to make lessons more accessible to students.

## **9.5. Limitations of the Study**

Whilst to the two teachers whose lessons I observed I must have appeared in an advantageous position (for it was after all I who observed, and they who had no choice but be observed), I see the study as being limited on various fronts because of the fact that as outsider researcher, I had limited power and therefore limited access to information. Given the initial difficulties in negotiating access to a school, and given that the teachers of School-X were in general unsupportive of research, I felt that I had to be grateful for however much or little I was allowed, and very careful to not ask for too much.

That the study had to be at the beginning of the year when everyone in class was new to each other meant that the teachers were, understandably, always busy adjusting to their new timetables and workloads, and attending to bureaucratic and administrative work that being a form teacher involves. The study would have benefited from having had more access to the teachers – certainly more than the one interview I was granted - particularly as observations eventually showed their key role in the co-construction of classroom culture. With more access, I would have been able to verify and triangulate interpretations with teachers. As it was however, in the interview, I had to be careful in not asking intimidating questions that would create ill feeling, and deny me access to more data.

Another limitation of the study was posed by the difficulties involved in studying culture. In calling for the use of a naturalistic research design, data collection was mostly open-ended. This meant that with the lack of focus as to exactly what information I needed, the data I eventually accumulated was on a wide front, but not nearly as detailed as I would have preferred. There are many questions I wished I had asked teachers and students regarding aspects of classroom culture that eventually surfaced as the foci of the study, questions relating to teacher instructions and student questions. This however is a methodology-related limitation: the subject of my study, classroom culture was wide and amorphous. Yet, the more I focussed on detail, the more the larger picture faded from view, and the more I

focussed on the larger picture, the less I could grasp of details. The difficulty then was in keeping a balance between detail and larger picture.

## 9.6. Further Research Directions

Having seen how classroom cultures can promote or deter learning, further research could investigate in a more concerted manner what this study did not and, in some ways, could not. There has been little previous research in student questioning behaviour. Given the important role of student questions, further research should explore how student questions relate to the lesson procedure, and to the eventual lesson. I would like further more focussed research to verify the findings of this study by looking at how students question in top- and tail-end classes. Could tail end students be disadvantaging themselves because they lack questioning skills? This research must therefore be located in Normal Technical classes.

## 9.7. Conclusion

The role of education in Singapore is complex and often contradictory. The overly optimistic formulations of the sixties have in some instances become now more darkly pessimistic. The government continues to refer to its people as its only natural resource, and the goal of education is still to develop the talents of every individual so that each can contribute to the economy and to the on-going struggle to make Singapore productive and competitive in the international marketplace. To stay true to this goal, the system has to be modified such that Singapore can harness and maximise *all* of its social capital. This would involve addressing learner needs, including those of the education under-class, the Normal Technical students. This may be somewhat idealistic in the realities of everyday life, for education is after all about politics and social engineering, and *“things will never be perfect until human beings are perfect”* (Thomas Moore).

Singapore education continues though to have the potential to contribute to enhanced human agency, greater civic tolerance and pluralism, and indeed in meeting the legitimate claims of the state for national cohesion and economic viability. The issues today are less with goals and more with means. This study has endeavoured to contribute to these ‘means’ by adopting a micro level approach as it considered the relationship between classroom interaction and the evolving classroom culture. The quality of education provided determines how well the

school system serves society, and what kind of investment is made in the future. Good teaching depends on good teacher training which in turn must be informed by research in educational theory and practice. It is hoped my study is helpful by pointing to areas where action needs to be taken to bring about better experiences, greater rewards, and fewer disappointments for teachers and students alike.

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# Appendix A: Example of Classroom Observation Notes

33/33

Sec 18 24/1/96 weds. 10:20 - 10:55

10:30

Tr enters class

Asks if st's 2 hand in compo. wks

Teacher returns drinks. E1 gives em art.

Sts are moving around - returning bks, handing in bks; throwing rubbish in: e bin at back of class.

10:35

Tr stands at centre front

Essay collect<sup>2</sup>.

says if not everyone handed in their essays

Tr says 'prove 2 me if you can be disciplined'

Tr takes a drink & she read.

She says she sees a lot of em putting in effort.

Put aside drinks.

Reminder & read<sup>9</sup> period next day

To morrow is read<sup>9</sup> period.

I remind you quota. Term 1 - 8 bks.

Next week - you'll be issued your lib<sup>y</sup> card.

1 bk - 1 bk review

Bk review reminder

If bk review is not submitted, e bk is not read.

10:40

3/4 of st's 7 - showing they've read a bk.

Tr is q<sup>9</sup> 2 prepare a read<sup>9</sup> chart to

show how many bks each st. has read.

Noted on

C5 has hand<sup>9</sup> 4 2 mss. already.



my grow abt. read?	
C5: 2 can we read game bks?	SS: Can any read game bks?
He goes up 2 4 2 show her an eg. 1 such a bk - so	
A she knows wt he means.	
Asks 4 sts 2 share their newspaper articles.	10.44 Newspaper article sharing.
FP: Story 1 qm molested in hospital.	
E1, C5: 'both have hands up'	
↓ asks abt the bk he's bought we has 4	SS: still abt e types 1 bks
starts - can he do 4 bk reviews?	cy can bring in.
E4: asks if he can bring his own bk 4 reading	
period tomorrow.	
1/2 class says they'd prefer 2 bring in own	sts want 2 bring own bk
bks 4 reading period.	4 read 9 period.
	10.47
2 bks 2 5 last grammar ex.	grammar ex.
DB: Many need 2 do corrections?	SS: correct as?
Tr says no need 2 do corrections.	
DB: must we enter in 2 contents page?	SS: contents pp?
p. 14: say 9 verbs.	

## Appendix B: The Twin Challenges of Education in Singapore

### *Education for National Cohesion*

“If we are not to perish in chaos caused by antagonisms and prejudices between watertight cultural and linguistic compartments, then we have to educate the right responses amongst our young in school.”

Lee Kuan Yew (speech reported in the Straits Times 9<sup>th</sup> December 1959)

With the challenges of nation-building looming large, the government's first task in building a cohesive society was to bring the different education systems together. Inculcating the ‘right responses’ entailed establishing integrated schools and standardising the system in terms of curricular and syllabi requirements, and examinations. The 60s was as such, for education, an intensive period of centralisation. In order to increase educational opportunity, schools were built (and ran two separate sessions a day), and teachers were recruited en masse.

Having made room for every child to attend school, cognitive and attitudinal dispositions were engendered through the inclusion of content on Singapore history, socio-demographic and economic characteristics, role in the region and information on political institutions. On a more explicit level, there was, and still is, the daily national flag raising and lowering ceremony accompanied with the singing of the National Anthem, and the recitation of the pledge affirming commitment to the nation's ideals of equality and multiculturalism. Daily attendance of this ceremony is compulsory for all pupils and staff.

Central to this education system was the fundamental political commitment to equal treatment of all groups, languages and cultures. With multiculturalism as the chosen ideology, there was an educational commitment firstly to preserving and enhancing the various ethnic cultures and traditions, and secondly to striving for a supra ethnic Singaporean identity. The former was to be achieved principally through the bilingual policy of mother tongue teaching, and the latter through English Language.

The bilingual education policy has become emblematic of the nation's (or rather the political leaders') commitment to multiculturalism. Although the logic of bilingualism became widely espoused in Singapore society in the 1970s, bilingualism as a policy is an issue which is

fraught with sensitive and culture-related emotional overtones. What has probably not been helpful is that the exact meaning of bilingualism has altered over the years. In the 60s and 70s, it referred to the learning of English and another language (of one's choice), since the 80s, it has come to refer to the learning of English and the language of one's ethnic background. The bilingual policy has also been under pressure from educational groups aiming for a more efficient system. However, despite indications that the demands of bilingual competence are difficult for most pupils and is primarily responsible for wastage, the commitment to bilingualism in schools has been steadfastly maintained over the decades.

On the positive side, bilingualism has been responsible for the language profile of the recently schooled population gradually moving towards the desired configuration: bilingual literacy has risen and more and more students are mastering English and more and more Chinese households are using Mandarin instead of the various Chinese dialects.

Language planning efforts in Singapore have been described as language management of human resources, as well as a proactive intervention to support non-linguistic goals (Kuo & Jernudd, 1944; Gopinathan 1994). The management of multilingualism, in which schools have played a large and significant part, has been deemed relatively successful (Gopinathan 1997, Yip 1997). However, a more critical evaluation of the government's language management policies would first necessitate a more precise definition of 'multilingualism', for not all languages have been maintained, and some have been actively discouraged. The government has defined and limited which languages are to be supported and which are to be acknowledged as languages.

The above discussion illustrates how the school has functioned as the crucible of linguistic change. For the majority of Singapore's students (bearing in mind the ethnic and linguistic profile), it is the place where the new languages of English and Mandarin are learnt. Having considered the issue of language in education, the discussion now turns to an equally important goal of education in Singapore: how it defines and shapes the Singaporean identity.

### ***Education for Economic Success***

Over the last four decades, education has played a pivotal role in fashioning a vibrant Singapore economy. This has been possible through constant meticulous fine-tuning of the

education system. With independence, there was early recognition that Singapore needed to transform its economy, both to create wealth for necessary infrastructural development and to meet the needs of a burgeoning population.

“Singapore’s national wealth lies in our human resources, and our human potentials must therefore be developed to the fullest possible extent. An educated and enlightened population is our guarantee for a prosperous future.” Ong Pang Boon (1966)

Political leaders singled out industrialisation as the basis of an economic strategy for modernisation. However, the overwhelming linguistic variation meant that the non-united population was unable to work towards a futuristic economy.

Education policy was thus devised to provide the country with a trained, cohesive manpower that spoke the same language. The 60s and 70s saw considerable attention being paid to making schooling economically relevant. The success of the industrial policy depended in part on the availability of technically and vocationally trained manpower. The dramatic increase in enrolment between 1981 and 1991 – from 9% to 24% for polytechnics and from 6% to 21% for vocational institutes – demonstrates the government’s success in re-orientating the pattern of educational involvement towards economic change. People were actively encouraged to get on with the job of falling in step with the new economy through government provision of training and educational infrastructure (Gopinathan 1997:36 – 44).

1986 witnessed the publication of a crucial report by the Economic Committee which, apart from recommending a comprehensive set of policy changes for the revival and stimulation of economic growth in Singapore, had significant implications for the future of Singapore’s education. Entitled “*The Singapore Economy: New Directions*”, it suggested some fundamental requirements for vigorous economic growth that would give the Singapore economy a competitive edge - one that is “as developed as the West, and yet more competitive” (Economic Committee, 1986). The report emphasised the need not only to educate each individual to his maximum potential, but also to develop a creative, thinking, and innovative Singapore society, complete with flexible skills at every level of the economy. It made recommendations that were to go on to determine the thrust of educational policy in the 1990s.

This report was significant in that in 1986, the minister of Education announced that future education policies in Singapore would be guided by three principles: policies would be geared towards keeping pace with the economy; education would emphasise basics; and schools would seek to promote creativity (see Yip 1997:25). Since the 50s, there had always been an attempt to synchronise socio-economic policies with educational policies. In 1986 however, this became a stipulated guiding principle for education in Singapore.

What has been remarkable in Singapore's economic achievements is the vision, the drive, and cohesion of the political and administrative machinery that has been thrown up to meet the challenge of development. This planning development experience is perhaps best understood in the context of the 'strong state' thesis advanced by Hage, Garnier and Fuller (1988). They single out 'strong state' characteristics which enable the state to achieve a tight coupling between education and economy minimises the slippage's between them, thus producing the conditions necessary for more direct impact of schooling on economic activity (see Gopinathan 1997:44).

## **Appendix C: The New Education System in Singapore**

### **Primary Education**

Primary education is made up of a four-year foundation stage (from Primary One to Primary Four) and a two-year orientation stage (Primary Five and Primary Six).

#### **The Foundation Stage**

The 'Foundation Stage' emphasises basic literacy and numeracy skills with 80% of curriculum time allocated towards providing pupils with a working knowledge of English and a good grounding in the mother tongue and Mathematics. Pupils also learn subjects like Music, Art and Crafts, Health Education as well as participate in Physical Education and extra-curricular activities.

The school keeps track of the individual pupil's performance at Primary One and Two and there is a school-based preliminary assessment at Primary Three before pupils move on to Primary Four. To better prepare pupils for subsequent educational paths, pupils are streamed 'according to their interests and orientation' at the end of Primary Four. The schools assess pupils' performance in English, the mother tongue and Mathematics using the Ministry's item banks to ensure comparability of standards across schools. All pupils then move on to the next stage of primary education in one of three language streams in the school (see below). Parents are advised on the appropriate stream for their children. They have the final say as to which stream they want their children to be in at Primary Five.

#### **Orientation Stage (Primary Five and Six)**

Pupils join one of three main language streams according to their abilities. The first stream (EM1) is for the academically able and linguistically talented pupils who take English and the mother tongue at a higher level, known as 'Higher Chinese', 'Higher Malay', or 'Higher Tamil'. The majority of pupils learn English and the mother tongue, that is Chinese, Malay or Tamil (EM2). Less able pupils offer English and either basic Chinese, Basic Malay or Basic Tamil, as they focus their attention on

English and Mathematics (EM3). (A fourth stream involving the learning of the mother tongue at a higher level (that is Higher Chinese, Higher Malay or Higher Tamil) and Basic English is available in schools only if there is a demand for it.)

All pupils offer the same curriculum for English and mathematics and the curriculum time for these two subjects may vary, depending on the need of the different ability groups. The orientation stage allows for further assessment of pupils' abilities, interests and aptitudes. Pupils are allowed lateral movement from one stream to another, and as a general guideline, transfers are effected by principals on the basis of pupils' progress in both the continual and semestral assessments.

## **The Primary School Leaving Exam**

This is a national placement exam that all pupils must sit for at the end of primary six. The exam assesses pupils' suitability for secondary education, placing them, according to their learning ability, in an appropriate secondary school course.

Pupils who have undergone their 'orientation' stage learning English and either Higher Chinese, Higher Malay or Higher Tamil, or Chinese, Malay or Tamil are tested on four subjects: English, the mother tongue (oral and written), Mathematics and Science. Pupils who take the mother tongue at Higher Chinese, Higher Malay, or Higher Tamil level may do so as an additional paper. Pupils who attain the necessary standards are then admitted to the Special, Express or Normal stream in secondary schools.

Pupils needing more time to learn offer only English, the mother tongue as Basic Chinese, Basic Malay, or Basic Tamil, and Mathematics at the PSLE. If they attain the required standards, they are admitted to the secondary Normal stream.

## ***Secondary Education***

Pupils take one of three courses designed to match their learning abilities and interests. They undergo either four or five years of secondary education with different curricular emphases. The majority of pupils undergo the four-year Special and Express courses whilst the rest enter the four-perhaps-five year Normal course (see below). Within the



Normal course, pupils have the option of taking the Normal (Academic) course or the Normal (Technical) course, both of which lead to the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education (GCE) “Ordinary” (O) level examination at the end of the fifth year.

### **Special Course**

In this course, pupils study English and the mother tongue at a higher level, (i.e. Higher Chinese, Higher Malay or Higher Tamil). At the end of Secondary Four, they sit the GCE “O” level examination.

### **Express Course**

The Express course also prepares pupils for the GCE “O” level examination in four years. Unlike in the Special course, pupils study English and the mother tongue, that is, Chinese, Malay or Tamil.

### **Normal Course**

In this course, pupils have, as compulsory subjects, English, the mother tongue and Mathematics. They sit the GCE “N” level examination at the end of the fourth year. Those who meet the criteria go on for a fifth year of study. On obtaining good results at the GCE “O” level examination, they can proceed to junior colleges, polytechnics or technical institutes. Many of those who complete the course in the fourth year, after sitting the GCE “N” level examination, are likely to take up technical and vocational education at the technical institutes.

Pupils in the Normal (Technical) course are prepared for technical-vocational education with the Institute of Technical Education. The curriculum is geared towards strengthening pupils’ proficiency in English and Mathematics. Pupils take as compulsory subjects, English, Mathematics, and Computer Applications, offering them at the “N” level examination at the end of the fourth year. Those who are able, can choose to continue another year to prepare for the “O” level examination.

## **Curriculum**

The curriculum for the Special, Express and Normal (Academic) courses includes English and English Literature, the mother tongue, Mathematics, General Science, History, Geography, Art and Crafts, Design and Technology and Home Economics, Moral Education and Music. At Secondary Three, pupils can opt for subjects of their choice, apart from the core subjects (English Language, the mother tongue, Mathematics, Music, Physical Education and Moral Education).

### ***Post-Secondary Education***

On completing secondary education, pupils can, if they qualify, proceed to either a two or a three-year pre-university programme. Admission is based on a points system computed from the pupils' GCE "O" level aggregate. At the end of this course, pupils sit the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of education "Advanced" (GCE "A") level examination, the results of which determine their eligibility for tertiary education at either a polytechnic or a university.

Alternatively, students completing secondary education can, if they qualify, choose to proceed with technical and commercial studies at a polytechnic. Upon graduation, they can pursue degree courses at one of the two local universities.

## Appendix D: School-X Student Diary

7

### SCHOOL RULES

#### 1. School Uniform

- 1.1 Pupils must be in school uniform when in school or attending school functions. See attached diagrams on school uniform and PE attire.
- 1.2 Pupils must be in proper PE attire during PE lessons and ECA.

#### 2. General Appearance

- 2.1 Girls should keep their hair short. Long hair should be neatly tied or plaited, and loose strands must be neatly pinned up. Only simple black hair clips, bands or ribbons are allowed.
- 2.2 Boys must keep their hair short. Hair should not be permed or tinted. See diagram attached for acceptable hair-style.
- 2.3 No nail polish or long nails are allowed. The wearing of jewellery is not allowed except for a pair of small gold or black ear studs for girls.

#### 3. Attendance and Assignments

- 3.1 Pupils must be punctual for school and all other school activities.
- 3.2 Absence from school must be covered by a medical certificate.
- 3.3 Pupils must not miss lessons and weekly assembly.
- 3.4 Pupils must hand in all assignments set by teachers.
- 3.5 Pupils must not leave school premises during school hours.

#### 4. Respect for

- 4.1 Pupils must respect and obey school authority e.g. Principal, HODs, teachers, prefects, monitors and non-teaching staff.

#### 5. General Behaviour

- 5.1 Pupils must queue up when buying food and return all utensils to their proper receptacles.
- 5.2 All food and drinks must be consumed in the canteen.
- 5.3 Pupils should leave their classroom during recess.
- 5.4 Pupils should not use foul language.
- 5.5 Pupils must not leave their classroom during curriculum time unless they hold a pass given by their teacher.
- 5.6 Pupils should not litter or spit.
- 5.7 Pupils are not allowed to invite their friends to school or to associate with outsiders in school.
- 5.8 Pupils must not engage in rowdy behaviour while in school.
- 5.9 Pupils are not allowed to bring walkman sets, CD players and pagers to school.

## 6. Serious Offences

- 6.1 Leaving school premises without permission.
- 6.2 Rudeness and defiance against authority (Principal, HODs, teachers and prefects).
- 6.3 Vandalism.
- 6.4 Gambling.
- 6.5 Theft and/or extortion.
- 6.6 Cheating, and attempting to cheat during tests and examinations.
- 6.7 Deception and/or forgery.
- 6.8 Gangster-like behaviour.
- 6.9 Smoking or in possession of cigarettes, lighters or matches.
- 6.10 Drug-taking and glue sniffing.
- 6.11 Indecent behaviour or using abusive language.
- 6.12 Bringing indecent literature and other similar material to school.
- 6.13 Fighting/Instigating others to fight.
- 6.14 Receiving police reports.

Any attempt to commit the above offences by a pupil will be seriously taken as an instance that he/she has already committed the offence.

## 7. General Rule

A pupil is considered to have broken a school rule

- 7.1 If the answer to any of these questions about his behaviour is a 'no':
  - Is the action right?
  - Is it done in the right place?
  - Is it done at the right time?
- 7.2 Or if the answer to any of these questions is 'yes':
  - Does the action hurt others?
  - Does the action hurt oneself?
  - Does the action damage property?
  - Is the action likely to hurt person(s) or damage property?

## EXPLANATORY NOTES TO SCHOOL RULES

### 1. School Uniform

- a) All pupils must wear the proper school uniform which is shown in the diagrams attached to the school rules. Any deviation from the accepted design will be considered a breach of the school rules.
- b) Shirts must not be oversized and they must be properly buttoned up and tucked in. Sleeves must not be folded up.
- c) Boys' short pants and trousers must not be tight or baggy. Trousers must not be folded up. The length must be as specified in the diagrams.
- d) High-cut shoes are not allowed. Shoes must be white.
- e) As long as pupils are in school, they must be in school uniform.

### 2. General Appearance

- a) Punk hair-styles or the latest fads such as tinted and dyed hair are strictly forbidden.
- b) Girls should make sure loose strands of hair are neatly pinned up and that the fringes of their hair must be above the eye-brow.
- c) Boys' hair must be cropped short and the back of their haircuts are sloped.
- d) Finger nails must be kept short.

### 3. Attendance and Assignments

- a) Attendance will be marked before the Flag Raising and Pledge Taking Ceremony. Pupils who are not present for this Ceremony will be marked as late in the class register.
- b) The number of days late will be reflected in the pupils' report books.
- c) The number of days absent from school will also be reflected in the report book.
- d) Action will be taken against pupils who do not hand in their assignments. Parents will also be informed.

### 4. Respect for

- a) When a teacher is not in class, monitors and prefects are expected to keep the class quiet. Pupils disobeying them will have their names taken down and reported for punishment.
- b) Pupils deliberately disobeying or going against authority (as defined in the rules) will be considered to have been defiant, and therefore, to have committed a serious offence.
- c) Trying to avoid punishment is also a punishable offence.

### 5. General Behaviour

Rowdy behaviour includes shouting, screaming, whistling, booing in class or along corridors, the banging of desks, chairs and doors, and the making of uncalled for noise.

**6. Serious Offences**

- a) Deliberate disobedience or rudeness to school authority will also be considered as defiance.
- b) Vandalism includes defacing notice boards, desks and chairs, damaging school property and scratching teachers' cars.
- c) Deliberate attempts to deceive through lying and the forging of signatures and documents are serious offences.
- d) Gangster-like behaviour includes extortion, swindling, intimidation, threats to harm others, etc., or attempts to do any of these acts.
- e) Indecent behaviour includes abusive language or any other behaviour that causes emotional or physical hurt to others.
- f) Pupils can expect surprise checks. If they are found to have evidence or hidden the evidence connected with any of the serious offences, it will be assumed that they have committed or intended to commit the offence.

**7. General Rule**

- a) The general rule is meant to teach pupils to differentiate between right and wrong. They should sincerely try to do what is right and not try to find loopholes in the school rules.
- b) Rule 7.2. If answer to any of the questions in this rule is 'yes', then the pupil has committed a serious offence.

## Appendix E: Transcription Conventions

### Speakers

T	English language teacher of Class B or Class D
Tcher	abbreviated from 'teacher', this is commonly used by students of the study when speaking with or referring to their teacher.
S	unidentified student
SS	two or more students
SC2	student occupying desk that is in the third column (where column A is line of desks closest to doors and E is line of desks along opposite wall) and in the second row from the front of the class.
SC3?	Probably student occupying desk C3

### Other Conventions

(( ))	extralinguistic information, including non-verbal behaviour
((unint))	unintelligible utterance
( )	actual name of person, (Principal, staff or student) that has been omitted for anonymity.
:	extension of syllables or sounds
-	abrupt cut-off
=	links utterances which do not have an interval between them
ya/yes	overlapping or simultaneous speech
< >	written text that is spoken or read aloud
"....."	text that is written on the blackboard
<b>bold</b>	emphasised word or syllable
!	emphasised utterance
new line	long pause

### Abbreviations within (...)

tr	teacher
st(s)	student(s)
b/b	blackboard
bk	book
compre	comprehensions
compo	composition





## Appendix F: Lesson B1

Friday 5<sup>th</sup> January 1996, 8.40 – 9.15 a.m.

I arrive at the class before TB does. The students greet me, saying “*Good morning, teacher*”. I introduce myself, telling them that I am there to observe their lessons. I take up my position at the back of the class, and they watch me as I set-up my audio-recording equipment. Some are interested in the equipment and ask me if the microphones are very powerful. After a few minutes, most students are speaking to their neighbours, no longer turning around to look at me. TB enters the class, and students rise. She says, “*Good morning, class*”, and they reply “*Good Morning, (TB)*”. She tells them to sit down.

- T yesterday, I told you people about the importance of reading, right? Reading the newspaper. You don't have to read it all. You have to read at least one article right?
- 5 SS yes/((sts nod))
- T how many of you did at least read one article, either from The Straits Times, or The New Paper? Honestly? Ok, how many of you read yesterday- only one article- except- minus cartoons, T.V. page. One article. How many of you read yesterday's paper?
- 10 SS ((sts raise hands))
- T just a few? the others?
- SS ((unint))
- T no time? Right. Uh:- next week onwards I'm going to call- this week I won't call, but
- 15 next week onwards, any time- I'm not going to tell you if it is your turn. Clear? Until I see you people read everyday. Whatever time I can spare, I'll say, “Ok, right, if you'd just like to tell me what you read in yesterday's papers”. Even if it's a short article- I can tell you the importance of reading. A lot of you are not reading. So you must make an effort, you must start- your new year's resolution, I already said, you must read. Start reading from now, Ok?
- 20 SS ((some sts nod))
- T anyone read any interesting thing? Any one would like to share?
- SS ((sts speak amongst themselves))
- T would you like to may be share one of the articles that you read? ((asking SE1 who had his hand up))
- 25 Ok, briefly, what's the article about?
- SE1 ((although some of it is unintelligible, st talks of a lady who was robbed in the lift as she was returning to her flat))
- 30 T ok, he read about the lady who was robbed in the lift. Right? He did not remember too many of the details. So, next time when you read, at least remember, remember the details- ‘wh’ questions, right, ((writes on b/b: “Wh – who, what, what, why, how.”
- sts are silent and attentive to what the teacher is writing on b/b)) Always remember, who, where, what, when, how, ok? These are very useful guide

35 questions. In other words, if you read an article, you should be able to tell me,  
 where. Could it be in Asia, or even as far as America? Who? Who was  
 involved? Ok, it could be an old lady, a teenager, or children. Why? Why did  
 it happen? Ok, yesterday I shared an article regarding irresponsible people,  
 40 right? They don't throw their litter at the right places. They basically dump  
 whatever unwanted furniture in the void deck. Then what happened? The  
 things caught fire, and some people got hurt. So that is the- what? How? So  
 whenever you read an article, try to bear in mind the following- so that when  
 you share with the class, you will be able to tell the class **how** it happened,  
**who** was involved, **when**? Ok? May be- like yesterday, I will like to share  
 45 with you, ok? May be this week- next week- I will also share with you some  
 interesting things that you read in The Straits Times or The New Paper, ok?  
 I'm not including the Malay newspaper or the Chinese newspaper. If you want  
 to read these, fine. I'm not saying, 'don't read'. But of course English is more  
 important. If you fail Chinese, you still pass, right? ((i.e. sts will be able to go  
 50 on to the next grade))  
 Yesterday, actually, I read an interesting article about the Japanese. Ok. This  
 article is taken from The New Paper. One school in Singapore, they call it  
 Crescent Girls. Any one has heard of this school? It's a Singapore school-  
 Crescent Girls. Anyone knows? ((she writes the name on b/b)) Anyone has  
 55 heard of this school?  
 SS ((unint. Some sts nod))  
 T yes, it's a girls' school, in the Queenstown area, ok? I'm not sure whether  
 they have changed their uniform- the last time, I know their uniform was a  
 yellowish colour. It's one of the- one of the good girls' school, ok? So- if I'm  
 60 not mistaken, the uniform last time was a yellowish blouse and a bluish skirt-  
 Crescent Girls. It's ranked one of the top few girls schools in Singapore. So  
 this school has this kind of exchange programme- exchange programme.  
 Unfortunately, our school we do not have it, right. The school sponsors the  
 girls. They go to Japan, right? So they stay in Japan with a family. This is a  
 65 kind of exchange programme where Singaporean students are sent over to  
 Japan, and Japanese students are sent over to Singapore on an exchange  
 programme. Ok? Anyone would just like to tell me – what do you think was  
 the purpose? What do you think was the purpose- why do you think they have  
 this kind of programme- this exchange programme? What is the purpose?  
 70 SB1 for culture and tradition  
 T very good. To learn culture and tradition. Right? Do you think the Japanese-  
 the way they behave, is similar to what we- our own lifestyle?  
 SS no  
 T in Malaysia, even in Indonesia, although they are close neighbours, they way  
 75 they live is not similar to ours. Ok? So, in fact it's not just this school but  
 other schools too which are the richer schools who can afford to sponsor their  
 students to another country. And the students stay with a Japanese family-  
 who would adopt these girls. Then they would stay with the family, and they  
 would really learn the culture. Ok? Now I was reading in the article yesterday-  
 80 a girl wrote about a Japanese city by the name of Matsuyama, all right. ((tr  
 writes name on b/b)) I think the spelling is like this. So the girls were sent  
 over here, and as I said, they stayed with a Japanese family, learn the lifestyle  
 and all that. It's not just a matter of one day- ok- because one day is not very  
 much. No, it was one week. And the girls came back to share with other girls  
 85 in the school. And they were very very impressed. Very impressed, ok. What  
 sort of things do you think the girls were impressed with? Anybody? What  
 sort of things the girls were impressed with the Japanese lifestyle?

S food

T not so much food. That is more Singaporean.

90 SS ((sts laugh. SE1 raises his hand))

T yes?

SE1 courtesy

T very good. See, he read ((the article)). Very good. The girls were impressed, the girl said- for example, how many of you when you eat at hawker centre, you bring back your bowl to the: hawker? How many of you do that? When

95 you eat at the hawker centre, or even let's say MacDonald's, right- do you just take whatever things you want to dispose off and put into the bin? Or just leave on the table? How many of you would, in other words, after you have eaten, even in hawker centre, ok- after you've eaten- of course in school you have to do it, right? If you don't do it you get into trouble, ok. ((sts laugh))

100 Because got punishment. But what about in hawker centre- how many of you can honestly say that after you've eaten, you take back the bowl, and give back the bowl, and say "Thank you". How many of you do that?

SS ((there is silence as first one, then two sts raise their hands))

105 T one? Two? What about at home? Ok, let's say, after eating, do you- do you help your mother?

SS yes

T how many of you don't? ((a few hands go up))

110 Very good- these are honest people, they are willing to own up. They don't help their mother. You must try to help, ok? I think I mentioned it at our first lesson, about the enrichment programme. I think this year, there is not enough teachers so you people will not have enrichment programmes. So very sorry, but the boys will not have to learn how to fry fried rice and all that- you've got to learn from your mother. Because I think this year, according to a teacher,

115 they do not have enough teachers so they will not have this programme. But in a sense, next year, next year, the students in Sec. one next year- compulsory- boys and girls do Home Ec. So you people are lucky- lucky or unlucky, I don't know-

S lucky

120 T next year onwards- from 1997 onwards- the Sec. one students, half a year they do Home Ec, half a year they do Technical. Home Ec is Home Economics. You're lucky, you are the last batch. Ok. Going back to this. How Kiat ((referring to SE1)) mentioned 'courtesy'. Among the people here- ok, it's a normal practice, may be if you eat at a hawker's centre, and after that you take the bowl, and give back to the hawker, other person will say you are a 'kiasu' person or whatever, so nobody does it. But this girl said she's impressed with the Japanese. In other words, when she went to the hawker centre, she just left the bowl on the table, just like other Singaporean. But she was so embarrassed, because when she went with the host family- the family that she

130 stayed with- she left the bowl on the table, thinking that it was the right thing to do. But the host took her bowl and returned it to the hawker. Isn't it embarrassing? Isn't it? I mean, it is so embarrassing to say that, your host family got to clear the thing for you. Ok? That's one thing. She was really embarrassed.

135 Another thing she said that among the Japanese, the word 'please' and 'thank you' is a very- what you call- something that they say every time. No one kind of reminds them, you know. For us, sometimes we have to be reminded, right? Isn't it? It doesn't come naturally sometimes. Of course for some people, it is part and parcel of your vocabulary. Every time you must have 'please'.

140 Anyone? 'Please' and 'thank you'. 'Excuse me', 'Good morning'. All this is

145 part of your vocabulary- already in your right vocabulary. Anyone? Don't be  
 shy. It doesn't matter, but it's true right? Sometimes Singaporeans, in the  
 process of rushing- rushing here, rushing there, they forget this type of things.  
 You want to borrow things from your friends. How many of you say "Please,  
 can I borrow-your pencil?", whatever? Do you? Or you just say, "Come lend  
 me". Or sometimes worse still, they just take and don't say anything, you  
 assume that that's your friend and he doesn't mind. Then after you return after  
 using, you just say, "That's your book". No 'thank you', nothing. But for the  
 150 Japanese- the girls- as I said- they were so impressed. In fact the reason why  
 our Singapore government introduced the courtesy campaign, it was because  
 of the Japanese government- the Singapore ambassadors- whenever they went  
 to Japan, they visit Japan, they also were very impressed with the Japanese. To  
 them, politeness is part of their life. Saying 'thank you', saying 'please' and so  
 on- natural- no need to be forced. No need to have campaigns. Wonderful,  
 155 right? So that is something which the girls learnt. It was a very very enriching  
 experience. When the girls came back they realised that Singaporeans now a  
 days- if you can read the papers, that's why I said you must read the papers-  
 now a days there is a lot of articles written about the ugly Singaporean. A lot  
 of articles- they litter, despite the fine- they litter here, they litter there. The  
 160 new flats, for example, Marine Parade, all beautifully done up now- upgraded  
 now- they look like condominium and so on. But the people, the social habits  
 still never change. They just dump things anywhere they like. They spit  
 anywhere they like. This is not nice. This is what you call the ugly  
 Singaporean.  
 165 I have shared with you one article. Occasionally, if I come across any  
 interesting article, I will share with you when we have time in our English  
 period, if I have a few minutes to spare. Everyone from next week onwards,  
 right, we'll start from Monday – I will tell you Monday is your turn, I'll just  
 pick anyone. So, make sure, next week, just start with one article. Start with  
 170 **one** article, then we progress. May be by the second week, you read two  
 articles, right? May be by February, at least you can safely tell me it has  
 become a kind of habit. And you can read more than two articles. May be one  
 page, two pages. Ok? So that by the end of the year, it has become a kind of  
 habit for you. It is a must- you must read, right? I'm not saying you stop at  
 175 newspapers, you understand? Because newspapers give you a lot of  
 information, but in terms of language style, your vocabulary and so on, you  
 need to also read story books, right? Ok.  
 Yesterday I promised to show you files- reading files- but as I said,  
 unfortunately, I returned a lot of the files last year. At the end of the year, I  
 180 returned all the files. These are the files- the students were absent- so they  
 didn't take back their files, so they are not the best, ok. I'm just showing you  
 as an example. Your reading file, ok. As I said there was one year when I got  
 to- when I ordered from the book shop black coloured, like this ((raises file))  
 black files. Then they- this is what I mean by folded type- where you just- you  
 185 don't have to punch hole. After you have done the review, you just slot in. I  
 think yesterday you people were in- you people are in favour of the punch-  
 hole type, right? Where you have to punch hole?  
 SS ((unint))  
 T ok, let me just count the hands. How many of you would like this kind of file?  
 190 It's easier because you can just slot in right?  
 SS ((most of sts raise hands))  
 T so, I think this is the majority. The majority, right?  
 SS ((nod))/yes



195 T ok, the majority, which means: this type of file obtainable, easily- easily obtainable from the bookshop, right? I'm not sure how much it costs- I think last time we paid around- now a days increased already- may be at most 60 cents? Isn't it? About-lah. I'm not sure. Ok, I leave it up to you. What about colour? You want to standardise?

200 SS =green/black/blue ((students suggest a range of colours simultaneously))  
T black is- er: sometimes difficult in terms of design.  
SS =red/green  
T ok, decide on a **common** colour  
SS ((sts continue to suggest colours))  
T take the easier colour because I want you people to: make your reading file a **special** file. So that at least you'll look at the reading file and say "Ooo, very nice file. I want to read some more." Ok? But if it's a very boring file, nothing there, you know.

205 S blue?  
T blue will be ok. Are you all agreeable? Ok?

210 SS no  
yellow/blue  
((sts continue to shout out preferred colours))  
T ok. How many people prefer blue? ((some sts raise hands)) How many people in this room? What is the majority? I believe there are 33 of us. How many in this class?

215 SS 33  
T ((tr counts the number of raised hands))  
The boys prefer blue, huh? It is a very nice colour. Ok. 17.  
T ok. What about the others? Yellow?

220 SS yes. Yellow.  
((only 3 hands go up and students start to laugh))  
T ok. Unfortunately yellow is outnumbered.  
Ok. What other colours?

225 SS green/light green/blue, huh?/sky blue huh teacher?  
T ok? So shall we standardise?  
S blue  
T I think blue is easier to get. Black is difficult, you know. Because the other time when I ordered from the bookshop they said "no more". So one or two persons had to be the odd one out. I prefer to have standardised so your class will take blue and 1A will have to take another colour. Ok? I'll give you the first chance to choose. So- ok, standardised?

230 SS ((nod))  
T right. This kind of file, ok, easier for you, you know why? I will not- I will keep the file for you so that you don't have to bring it home. Ok?

235 This weekend- I give you homework this weekend. Can you buy the file? Buy the file and decorate. But please- because it is a reading file- so please don't put pictures of your movie stars, or film stars and rock singers. Right? If it is a music file it's ok for you to put your favourite singer. But this is going to be your reading file, so as I said- I'll appreciate if you think of something may be related to reading or something. Whatever. Or to some books. I know previously a girl- one girl who bought wrapping paper with all the ((unint. something to do with books)). But I think for you people make it simple. You don't have to do front and back. You know- because front like this is enough. Like this, this way. ((raises a decorated file)) So that this is the file and you have it this way ((holds file horizontally and points with her finger)) "My:: Read::ng Fi::le". Ok ? So in the cover you just have the words- so in the

240  
245

cover you just have the words- you write "My:: Reading File". So whether you want to do this kind of lettering or you want to do fanciful lettering, it's up to you-lah. And then you have your na::me and cla::ss. Ok?

250 ((tr writes on b/b:  
 "My Reading File  
 Name  
 Class ")))

255 This ((pointing at words on b/b)) must appear on the cover here ((points at file)). Ok? So you have "My Reading file" and you have your name and your class. That's all. Ok? For the cover. After that if you want to design, let's say design a- ((she picks up sample files)) as I said these are not the best. Some of the ones that were done were very very attractive but I've returned half of them ok? So- may be you can come up with some nice creative ideas. So that will be your homework for the weekend. Buy the file, make it nice. Ok?

260 By the ti::me- by I think next week, by:: uh, ok- we look at the majority again. By, let's say, Wednesday, it's all ok? Can you get it done by Wednesday?

SS no

S Monday can

265 SS no, no

T I thought you can

S ((informs tr that they have to prepare a file for another subject))

T also got to decorate?

SS ((sts nod))

270 T ok. By next week Friday. Ok? Friday?

SS yes

T ok. By Friday. This coming Friday, ok? That is one week. You know what I mean? Right? Simple uh? You don't have to make it a:: a:: masterpiece. As long, as I said, I do not want to see like last year there was one with a pirate's skeleton. This student liked pirates-

275 SF4 =tcher, we just put wrapping paper, can?

T wrapping paper? If possible, make it, like I said make it, make your reading file different from your other files, huh? Ok? Don't be lazy. Ok? You have one week.

280 SD6 don't be lazy ((saying to classmates around him))

S =tcher, can paste things?

T paste? Ok fine, if you think you want to paste- like this is from a magazine, this also is pasted ((she shows class another example)). You can take may be from a magazine and paste like this also. Either you draw or you paste I leave it up to you. Ok? Use your imagination. Use your own creativity. Ok? Once your files are ready, I, I, I photocopied for you this. This is the 'Contents' page. Remember I told you yesterday, each time after you have read a book, you have to do a review. Right? And after you have done the review, and after I have marked the review, you have to enter the 'Contents page' here. ((she points to the piece of paper)) Example number one. Let's say you read a story- uhh... "Beauty and the beast". Ok- just give you an example. Ok. That's not my favourite. You just write "Beauty and the Beast" ((tr points to different headings on the paper as she mentions different items)), the author's name, then the publisher. Right? And weather you like it or not. Just enter. Ok? Why

285 do we ask you to do this? Remember I told you we are going to award **marks**, right? One year minimum 20 books. So when we check we will see from here ((i.e. by looking at the 'Contents page'))how many books you have read.

290

295

SF4 tcher, how do you know we really read it, or not?



300 T ok. Right. Very good question. How do we know whether you read or not? I  
 will- when you come to the class during Reading period, I will check the  
 book, ok. And roughly, you will tell me what page you are at and so on.  
 Roughly. Over the years, a teacher really knows how to tell whether a person  
 really reads or a person do not read. Some students are very clever. They don't  
 305 read. They just take the book and copy the front page. Normally the story- the  
 front part you have the review telling you what the story is about, right? Ok.  
 Please do not cheat. Remember I told you – it is important – if you cheat you  
 are not going to improve yourself. No point having **20** books but it's not the  
 books that you read. It's better to have five books but you really read, isn't it?  
 310 No point having **20** books- **Wow! Wonderful!** You read 20 books but actually  
 don't read you know. You just copy. I hope you are honest people and  
 remember you are going to improve yourself, ok? So you cannot cheat.  
 I will be providing you- I have photocopied but I will not be giving it to you  
 yet until your files are ready. Each file will get- I think- 10 review forms. Each  
 315 of you will get 10. 10 different book review forms. I don't have a complete set  
 yet, but I'll just show you some like this. 'Plot of a story'... ((tr goes through a  
 few prepared book review forms)) Right? This is one example. There is this  
 ((unint)) – your (reaction?) to the story. Different forms- different forms:-  
 different ways of writing reviews. It's not all the reviews that you got to write  
 the story from the start to the end, ok? For certain book reviews you are  
 320 supposed to write the character. Sometimes you write the most interesting  
 part. Sometimes you write the reasons why you don't like the story. Another  
 one with the plot from the start to the end. Ok? Then you've got also the devil  
 one.  
 SS =tcher, cannot see ((sts strain to see what the teacher is holding up))  
 325 T cannot see never mind. Later on I will give you. This devil- 'The character I  
 dislike very much'. Wah! That's why the devil. Ok? Huh. ((sts laugh))  
 There are some more. Later on I will show you other things- we've got  
 'Garfield'. We've got 'Birthday present'. We've got all types. Ok. You like  
 the 'Power Rangers' very much.  
 330 What we will be giving you- What we will be giving you is just the minimum.  
 There are sometimes students who are very creative- very good with the  
 computer. They do not want to do the review that we prepared for them.  
 SD2 =can we design own book review at home?  
 T if you think you want to do a review with the computer, it's ok.  
 335 S =can do our own print-out, huh?  
 T yes. Can. If you have a computer at home and you want to do a design using  
 the computer, then you can do so. Then you can also write your review on a  
 computer, yes. Right? For those people who are very talented and they have  
 340 ability to draw very well, and they do not like to use the one that I'm giving  
 you- you can design your own design. Yes. Right? Because in the past we give  
 them the minimum but afterwards there are some students who are very very  
 creative, they come up with their own design, right? These are the things we  
 like. These are the things that show you really love to read. Like I said- to  
 improve yourself in English is to read. You cannot memorise, you cannot  
 345 write assessments – uh: assessments may be ((unint)). The best ingredient to  
 improve yourself is to read. To read and to speak. To read is to improve the  
 language, ok? And our Head of the English department has said to us  
 "All English teachers, you must remind the students to improve their English.  
 Anyone who does not use the language must be punished."  
 350 Ok? As far as possible read – I'm not only encouraging you to read – but as  
 far as possible- please also **use** the language. All other subjects- in other

words- only your Mother Tongue period will you be allowed to speak Chinese or Malay. All other periods please speak English. Ok – if you want to improve yourself, want to get the distinction or a good mark in Sec. four, start now in Sec One. Don't wait until Sec. four- before '0' levels then you start reading. Then you have no time. You must start from now – I told you make it a 1996 resolution- that you must start to read as much as you can now. Ok? That's why from Monday I will pick some people to share any interesting articles from the papers. We take turns. We take turns. But those people who share on Monday does not mean "Ok- teacher call me already- so no need to worry". I might just call you again ok? Everyday you read- any time, I just call you, huh? Clear, so far?

Are there any questions? Because next week we will be starting lessons **proper**. These past two days I just want to thresh out anything, about the books whatever. Ok? Any questions? I've explained regarding exercise books? How many exercise books do you need?

SS two/three/three  
SD6 uh: three  
T what are they?

370 SS grammar/compo/compre  
T wait, wait, wait. Right. This is again another bad habit of yours. Answer one by one, ok?  
((students put up their hands. Tr points at SE5))

SE5 comprehension, compo and grammar  
375 T good. Right, three books, clear? Get it done. In other words- set them aside- Monday, we have double period right? I want you to bring your textbook- just your textbook- please remember- and also this is again something- I want you to look up.  
((tr writes on b/b:  
380 "1. Textbook  
2. Any old photograph of yourself"))  
Monday, bring your textbook: and- right- number two.  
Ok, your textbook and number two– because Monday will be the unit in your textbook on growing up.

385 S =tcher, must have photograph, huh?  
T now listen, I want each of you to go home and look through your photo album- and look for old- old photographs. I do not want last year's lah. Look for photos when you were much much younger.

SD5 tcher, when we are babies huh?  
390 T even when you were three years old, it doesn't matter. Because then we will do group work, right. I'm not going to tell you- I'm not going to spoil the suspense. I will explain until there, and tell you all the details on Monday. But I want you to look for a photograph. Ok? As I said, we will be discussing the topic 'Growing up'. Right?

395 Go home today. Get your photo album. Look at some uh: nice photographs. I do not want Primary six, Primary five. If possible, may be uh:  
S =when we are a baby  
T if you want to bring photo of yourself when you are a baby- ok, fine.  
SF4 =tcher, when you, uh, you are in kindergarten, can?

400 T kindergarten can. Yes. Just one photo. The person who does not bring, will be the first to share. Who does not bring, who forgets, will be the first to share. Ok?  
((sts are heard inhaling in fear as they do not want to be the first to share their article))

405 SF4 =tcher, don't have one photo, how?  
 T you tell me you don't have one photo also?  
 SF4 all in Indonesia  
 T ok- ((addresses the class)) if you have a valid reason, if you are, for example,  
 410 like he said he is from Indonesia and all his things are there, it's ok. But  
 remember, unless you have a very valid reason, you will be the first to share. I  
 don't want a recent photo – at least 5 years back? For example- Primary One.  
 We're going to bring ourselves back down memory lane.  
 SF4 =tcher, my sister's photo, can? ((sts laugh))  
 T no, no no. Just of yourself. Unless you want to look at your sister for your  
 415 work on Monday.  
 SD5 =tcher, the photo must be only us?  
 T the photo does not mean only yourself, it can be yourself, your mother... you  
 know? Your brothers and sisters – as long as you are there-lah. Ok? Clear?  
 SS yes  
 420 T we will be doing an activity for Monday so please go home and look at your  
 albums, huh? Look back at those old days. Clear? So Monday, English- just  
 these two. ((tr points at what she wrote earlier on b/b)) the exercise book you  
 don't have to bring first. Just these two. Clear?  
 Any questions? Any things to ask me about English? Three exercise books.  
 425 By when must your files be ready?  
 SS by Friday/Friday  
 T very good. by Friday I am going to collect, ok? Friday, I will give you the  
 'contents page', I will give you the book review forms, everything. Ok? You  
 will slot it into the file and I will collect one by one. I will keep for you the  
 430 file, ok? Only Reading period- I will bring the file to the class. Save the  
 trouble for yourself bringing the file back and forth to school, huh? Any  
 questions?  
 Clear? Any doubt?  
 Any thing you are not so sure still? As I said, next week we will start lesson  
 435 proper and I might not have time to really explain all these things. Ok? You  
 are sure now? Ok? Only so far two persons- one from Malaysia and one from  
 Indonesia claim that they don't have any old old photograph.  
 SE5 =tcher got funny one can bring?  
 T the most humorous one you can send to 'Gotcha' ((this is a T.V.  
 440 entertainment programme. sts laugh)). Ok? Right, if you are very clear about  
 English, about exercise books, about what to bring for tomorrow:  
 SS yes  
 T remember- your homework for the weekend. Number one – get all your  
 exercise books ready. Number two- get your reading files ready. Buy it. Get it  
 445 ready.  
 SF4 =tcher, I thought you are buying for us  
 T no, no, no  
 SF4 you order the file for us, can?  
 SS order for us, tcher! ((unint))  
 450 T no, no, no. I order also it is the same price.  
 SS never mind  
 ((unint))  
 S tcher, must be sky blue, huh?  
 S dark blue, can?  
 455 T I think sky blue is easier to decorate. Remember we want to standardise.  
 S =tcher, cannot find, how?  
 T can find. There are so many in the shops.

S any blue can lah.  
 SF4 tcher, if cannot find, how?  
 460 T if cannot find, find. ((tr says this with a smile and sts laugh))  
 Ok. Right. Your reading files. Get ((them)) ready. And look at your old photo  
 album. Clear? ((it's almost the end of the period, and sts start to look restless.  
 The bell rings))  
 T thank you, class  
 465 SS ((sts stand)) thank you, (TB) ((they turn around to face me)) Thank you, Miss  
 Sandhu.

## Appendix G: Lesson D1

Thursday, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1996, 8.40 – 9.50 a.m.

I enter the class with TD, who says “Good morning, class”. Students rise and say, “Good morning, Mrs (TD)” to her. She corrects them, saying she is ‘Madam (TD)’ and tells them that I am ‘Miss Sandhu’, writing these on the board. She then greets them again, and students respond by greeting us individually, saying “Good morning, Madam (TD). Good Morning Miss Sandhu”. She tells them that I am there to observe how the class gets on. I take up position at the back corner of the class and set up the audio-recording equipment while she picks up her textbook. The students are quick to do likewise. She turns to page one, lifts the book, holding it open for the class to turn to the same page, and they do.

T ok, yesterday first of all- yesterday I taught you how to get into your pairs- pairs and groups. But for today, turn around, I just want you to get into pairs- row by row, but for the next time, I’m going to say- ‘All of you move into your pairs’ and I expect you to get into your pairs. ((sts move noisily but soon quieten down. They pick their tables and form pairs with the person behind them. Some sts in mixed gender pairs seem uncomfortable with their partner. They do however seem eager and well-behaved, and look attentively at the tr))

I can see that some of you are not happy because your partner is a boy or a girl. Come on, this is healthy learning. All right, this side is very good ((pointing to the front half of the class. She looks at sts without saying anything. They quieten)) All right, turn to the first page of your textbook.

Ok, most of you come from different schools, right? You don’t really know everybody as yet. Today is your first day ((i.e. first full day of lessons)), so the first thing we are going to do is very appropriate. Very suitable- a way for you to get to know your friends. But how to do this? Let’s look at the pictures in the book.

Can you see Aziz? How does Aziz introduce himself? He: says <My name’s Aziz.> and the other guy- John says: <Hi, my name’s John, and this is Zi Wei.> Then somebody else says: <Hello, I’m Sumei, and this is: Usha.> Ok? First of all: I’d like you- may be you already know someone- your friend, ok: never mind. Just use any of these methods, or even any other creation of yours. May be you don’t want to say ‘Hi’, you want to say ‘Hello’. You can say something else but it needs to be acceptable- no bad language.

How dare you! ((tr directs this to st who is talking at the same time))

Introduce yourself to your partner. Then very quickly just turn around- you don’t have to turn your chairs. Just turn your body around. And then introduce yourself to the person behind you? Ok? Ready? Go! ((most sts don’t say anything. They seem unsure as to what to do, and some whisper to their partners))

Introduce yourselves to your friend first. ((seated)) Next to you. Next to you first and then turn around. Next to you first. ((sts still appear unsure. Some speak to their partners before turning around))

Ok- you’ve done it too fast. I want you to introduce yourself and the four people around you ((she probably means 3, not 4 people)) Go!

((sts talk in low tones to each other. When they quieten, tr points at SF3 who stands))

SF3 my name is (SF3)

35 T the rest- listen when somebody is talking. Can you all hear his name?  
SS no/yes  
T again, louder  
SF3 my name is (SF3)  
T sorry?  
40 SF3 (SF3)  
T (SF3)?  
SF3 yes  
T ok ((looks at st next to SF3. Instead of SF3 introducing SE4, SE4 speaks))  
SE4 my name is (SE4)  
45 T sorry?  
SS (SE4)  
T ok: ((she points to the student behind SE4, expecting SE4 to introduce him))  
SE4 I don't know his name tcher  
T I told you to introduce both ways ((i.e. the person beside and the person behind))  
50 Ok- you didn't do your work. I will repeat: I want you all- Ok, I will try once again.  
First, introduce the person- uh- first ask the person next to you their name. Learn the  
name. Then, move your body, turn around, and ask- you must know all the other  
people's name in that group. You must know. Then I can call for anybody to  
introduce the rest of the group. Do you understand what I'm saying to you?  
55 SS yes/((some sts nod))  
T ok, sit down and we'll try that again. Ok, everybody, speak to the person next to you.  
Listen to my instructions. ((sts speak to their partners))  
All right, turn around, turn around. ((sts do as told. There is more confidence as all  
sts are for the first time engaging in the activity. SC3 writes the name of his partner,  
60 and the tr sees this))  
uh uh. You are not writing the names. Do not write the names down! You have to  
memorise. ((sts put their pens down. They ask each other to repeat and spell names))  
ok. Are you ready? ((sts quieten, and tr points to SD3))  
ok- I'm going to bully this young man here. Ok ((nodding at SD3))  
65 SD3 my name is (SD3)  
T everybody knows (SD3)?  
SS yes  
SD3 her name is (SC3) ((looking at SC3))  
T (SC3)?  
70 SD3 yes. And his name ((looking at SD4)) is (SD4)  
T she is? ((pointing at SC4))  
SD3 she is (SC4)  
T (SC4). Very good!  
SD4 ((claps))  
75 T ((looking at SD4)) yes, clap. Ok, one more. What about you? ((pointing at SA5))  
SD4 shut up ((tells SC4 who is talking))  
SA5 my name is (SA5)  
T yes  
SA5 and my friend- my friend name is (SB3)-  
80 T my friend is:  
SA5 my friend name is (SB3)  
T my friend is:  
SA5 my friend is (SB3). And this girl name is-  
T and she is:  
85 SA5 she is (SB2)  
T ok. Now, turn to the next page. What do you see?  
SS animals



T what kind of animals?  
 SS dolphin/cat/peacock:  
 90 T ((writes animal names on b/b as sts say them))  
 dolphin, cat, peacock, what else?  
 SS shark/horse/polar bear/tiger  
 T tiger: ((tr keeps writing))  
 ok. All right, first look at the pictures. Pick one that you like-  
 95 SS dolphin/peacock-  
 T don't say anything- just pick one that you like. Don't tell me, ok. Now, this is going  
 to be difficult, because if you are noisy- if you are noisy, the class next door will be  
 disturbed. Ok? Go and find someone who likes the same picture as you do, and sit  
 next to the person. The other person has to get up. ((sts seem lost and look at each  
 100 other))  
 Ok, I better do it- this row ((pointing at row F)) has to go first. Go and find someone  
 who likes the same picture. ((row F sts look at the open books on row D's desks.  
 Some row D sts are helping the task along by pointing at the picture of the animal  
 they like. TD sees this))  
 105 Uh-uh, you're not going to change for convenience. Right, come on, go! Go! ((Sts  
 don't move))  
 All right, I think I'll make it easier for you. Who likes the dolphin? ((sts raise their  
 hands)) Ok – why don't you get into pairs, pull up your chairs. Ok? ((sts move to  
 form pairs))  
 110 Right, horse. Horse. ((some sts raise their hands. tr senses their hesitation))  
 Right. Ok- hold on. I want everybody to have decided. Have you all decided?  
 SS yes  
 T right, horse ((horse-lovers raise their hands))  
 Chick ((sts raise their hands and make pairs))  
 115 Peacock  
 At the end of it, if I find that you did not put up your hand, I will punish you.  
 Peacock  
 Shark. Go, move, move.  
 Cat. Go, look around, move. Cat. ((sts move to form pairs of cat lovers))  
 120 All right, who did not move? ((2 boys raise their hands and the tr asks one of them))  
 What animal do you like?  
 S shark  
 T and you? ((asking second boy))  
 S shark  
 125 T all right, go find yourself two empty chairs and sit together. Any one else likes  
 sharks?  
 SS no  
 T first: you introduce yourself to your new partner, and then take turns to tell them  
 why you have chosen that picture. ((sts begin task)) So, first- listen – first, for  
 130 example- he ((tr points at one of two boys forming a pair)) will tell him why he has  
 chosen a cat for example. After he has listened to him, he will then tell him why he  
 has chosen cats. I will then call him to tell us why they like cats, for example. ((sts  
 begin activity as tr circulates, listening to their conversation. She sits at her desk, and  
 waits for sts to complete their activity))  
 135 All right, can I first have volunteers- I don't want to call anyone. Volunteers?  
 SS ((sts playfully volunteer each other's name))  
 T I'm not going to call on you- I want volunteers. ((sts sense the serious tone and fall  
 silent))  
 So you sit there, I sit here. You stare at me. I stare at you.  
 140 ((SC5 raises her hand)) Good. What have you chosen?



SC5 chick ((she appears shy and speaks hesitantly with her hand over her mouth))  
 SS chick, chick ((helping her so that the tr hears her))  
 T ok, why?  
 SC5 because they are yellow, and cute.  
 145 T yellow and cute. Why has your friend chosen the chick?  
 SC5 because ((unint))  
 T ((repeats SC5's response. sts laugh))  
 SD3 tiger eat the chick ((sts laugh))  
 T tiger eats the chick. And then what happens?  
 150 SD3 tiger eat anything  
 T and tiger becomes:?  
 SS fat  
 T and then he eats the rest of the animals. All right class. More volunteers? Somebody  
 else?  
 155 I'm not calling you:. You stare at me, I stare at you:.  
 Good ((SF2 has his hand up)) Yes?  
 SF2 ((unint))  
 T can you speak louder so that the rest can hear you.  
 SF2 I like dolphin because they swim well. He like-  
 160 T he like? He: likes-  
 SF2 he likes dolphin also because he say-  
 T because he says-  
 SF2 he says they are very cleverer-  
 T cleverer?  
 165 SS clever  
 T clever. It is a- a: clever:- a clever animal.  
 SF2 it is a clever animal  
 T you say it is a clever animal? Have you seen them before?  
 SS yes  
 170 T where?  
 SS T.V./television  
 T ok. What did you see them doing on T.V? What were they doing?  
 SS a show/show  
 T ok, what were they doing in the show? What were they doing? Trying to do some:?  
 175 SS tricks  
 T ok, yes. Next? Yes? ((SD2 raises hand, and answers without standing))  
 SD2 I like shark and ((unint. Sts laugh))  
 T =and they eat people as their food? ((sts laugh)) Don't laugh at him. Come, try again.  
 Ok, what did you say?  
 180 SD2 I like them because they are harmful.  
 T harmful? Dangerous? You like them because they are dangerous?  
 SD2 yes  
 T ok, let's have one last one. Volunteers? So far you've been very good- you've  
 volunteered. I'm very happy with you. Come, one more.  
 185 ((SD4 puts hand up)) Yes?  
 SD4 I like ((unint))  
 T you like?  
 SD4 I like horses. I like to watch them run. ((unint))  
 T they can carry you. Can they bring you to school? What other reason?  
 190 SD4 they can run fast.  
 T what about your friend- what does he say?  
 SD4 horse can jump.  
 T they can jump? Normally what do horses do?

SS ride  
 195 T it gallops. Have you heard of the word gallops?  
 SS yes  
 T anything else?  
 So, ((tr writes on the board as she speaks  
 I like...  
 200 He/she likes  
 We ... ))  
 I- I like:, but he:?  
 SS likes  
 T or she- what happens?  
 205 SS likes  
 T likes. What about 'we' – when you're in your groups? We:?  
 SS like  
 T ok. In your books, on the next page, <Usha and Sumei-> do we have a Sumei in this  
 class? ((Sumei is a popular name amongst girls in Singapore))  
 210 SS no  
 T <Usha and Sumei are classmates. They like each other.> They like. So we can now  
 add one more. ((she adds "they like" to the list on the b/b))  
 they like, or they likes?  
 SS they like  
 215 T huh? With 's' or without?  
 SS without  
 T ok. They like each other. Just take your pencil and underline the word like. Like.  
 ((sts move back to their respective desks to get pencils))  
 Ok, 1D, are you following me?  
 220 SS yes  
 T can you understand me?  
 SS yes  
 T ok, let's find out how well Usha knows Sumei? Usha knows- what am I  
 emphasising? What am I trying to stress on- what am I trying to tell you when I say  
 225 ssssss?  
 SD4 two person ((st seems to answer without understanding the question))  
 T Usha and:? ((tr appears to backtrack, taking cue from SD4))  
 SS and Sumei  
 T So, when I say Usha knows- did I say Usha know? Or did I say Usha knows?  
 230 Usha is a boy or a girl?  
 SS girl!  
 T if I do not want to keep calling her Usha, and calling Sumei, Sumei, when I talk  
 about them what do I say?  
 SS she  
 235 T ok, she likes, or in this case she knows. ((tr writes "she knows" on the b/b))  
 All right, Usha has completed the sentences below as if she was Sumei. Usha is  
 going to pretend that she is?  
 SS Sumei  
 T Usha is going to pretend that she knows all about Sumei. I'll read to you. <I like the  
 240 colour red because it suits me.> Who is the 'I' referring to?  
 SS Sumei  
 T good. <My favourite time of the day is the morning. I like the fresh air. I enjoy  
 jogging, cycling and shopping. I like people who are cheerful and well-mannered.  
 People like me because I am helpful. I sometimes worry about my parents because  
 245 they work very hard. My biggest fear is heights. Looking down from high places

scares me. My ambition is to be an art teacher because I'm good in art. The kind of music I like is classical.>  
 So, do you think Usha is very accurate about Sumei? Do you think she's accurate? Do you?  
 250 We don't know do we? We don't know til we? What must we do now?  
 SS read  
 T turn to the next page, and then do what?  
 SS read  
 T read. Who is the person?  
 255 SS Sumei  
 S She's going to tell you about her:?  
 SS self  
 T and then we are going to compare with? What Usha has said. Does anybody want to read? ((SB1 puts his hand up))  
 260 ok, read. ((SB1 stands and reads the first paragraph))  
 Ok, thank you. Now, somebody else read the next paragraph. ((SE2 bids with hand raised and tr nods. SE2 reads the next paragraph))  
 Ok, thank you. Somebody else- to read another paragraph. ((SA4 bids and reads. Tr does not at any point interrupt any st to correct pronunciation))  
 265 Ok, last paragraph. The girls are rather quiet in the class. We haven't heard a female voice.  
 ((SA5 volunteers, tr nods to her and she reads until the end of the passage)) Ok, Usha and Sumei. Is Usha accurate about Sumei?  
 SS no  
 270 T now you discuss what is correct and what is wrong. ((sts begin discussing with their partners, and seem involved in their work))  
 May be you'd like to underline what is correct, and circle what is not correct. Ok? So it's easier for you to tell me later. ((tr stands at the b/b ready with chalk in hand. sts are on task. She draws two columns – one entitled 'Simmilarities' and the other 'Differences'. She then circulates amongst the sts))  
 275 Can I ask you whether you carry dictionaries to school?  
 SS no  
 T then, do you know the meaning of 'aggressive'? Do you know the meaning of 'violent'?  
 280 SS fighting/violent is fighting  
 T violent is fighting, what else?  
 SS using a lot of weapons/blood  
 T ok, force. Right. Are you going to wait for me to tell you all the meaning of these difficult words all the time?  
 285 So what's going to happen to you when you don't know the words?  
 SS ((silence))  
 T so are you going to bring your dictionaries?  
 SS yes ((only a small number of sts answer in chorus))/ tcher, very big  
 T your dictionaries are very big, is it?  
 290 SS thick, tcher/verythick, tcher/heavy  
 T right, do you have a pocket-sized dictionary?  
 SS no  
 T if you don't have dictionaries, you are not going to?  
 SS learn/find the meaning  
 295 T so, what do you suggest?  
 SS bring the dictionary/leave in class  
 T bring the dictionary to class, and leave it in class? Ok, let's see. You want to leave it here. Put it under the table. You want to take the risk, is it?

SS yes  
 300 T I don't know what will happen to it  
 SD4 one body bring one dictionary  
 T one body? One person brings one dictionary? How about this- you're sitting in pairs, right? So:. So in the first week, one of you will bring and in the second week, the other person will bring. Until I can see whether- that you have it- what else can you do? What else can we do to get the dictionary here?  
 305 SS ((some sts continue to discuss leaving their dictionaries under their tables))  
 T ok, tomorrow, at least one person in the pair must bring the dictionary. You sort it out among yourselves.  
 S alahmak! ((Malay expression, the English equivalent of which is 'My God!'))  
 310 T is that clear? I am not going to give you the meaning of every word all the time because you will forget. If you take the trouble, you open the dictionary, you will remember. Ok?  
 Now, what are some of the things that Sumei said- Usha said about Sumei that are correct- that are correct, that are similar? So what would you call that? Instead of similar?  
 315 SS same  
 T yes, so if things are the same, they are?  
 SS similar  
 T therefore we are looking for the?  
 320 SS similarities  
 T ok, close your eyes and spell similarities  
 SS S-I-M-I-L-A-R-I-T-I-E-S ((sts say this in unison))  
 T ok, then she said a lot of things that were what?  
 SS different  
 325 T different. That were not the?  
 SS same  
 T they are:?  
 SS different  
 T how do you spell different?  
 330 SS D-I-F-F-E-R-E-N-T  
 T yes, what's this? ((pointing to b/b)) we are looking for the?  
 SS differences  
 T so what are- what are the things that are the same? Usha is right- what is she right about Sumei?  
 335 SS shopping  
 T ok, she enjoys shopping. What else?  
 SS colour  
 T I notice that the same people are always participating- those who are quiet- no I don't want you ((directed at SF4)). I want somebody else. One, she enjoys shopping.  
 340 Two? No, not you, I want to see somebody else. The girls?  
 Girls, we are waiting for you?  
 Yes? You answered just now, right? ((referring to female st who answered earlier))  
 Somebody else.  
 SB4 ((unint))  
 345 T so, she enjoys shopping. She enjoys? Yes?  
 SS shopping  
 T shopping. Ok, hold on ((begins to write on b/b)) She? She like or likes?  
 SS likes  
 T people who are cheerful and?  
 350 SS well-mannered

T ok, what do you mean when you say somebody is well-mannered? ((she writes on the board:  
 "Enjoys shopping  
 Likes people who are cheerful and well-mannered"))

355 SS kind/very kind/very thoughtful  
 T did someone say something like discipline? The person knows how to what? To?  
 SS behave  
 T give me an example of something to show that you have got good manners. Very simple example.

360 SS don't make noise  
 T don't make noise when what?  
 SS when the tr are talking/ don't make noise when the tr is talking  
 T yes, good. And when the tr walks in, you stand up and what?  
 SS greet him

365 T yes, good. That's good manners. Then you also have good manners when you are at? Home. When you have your dinner, when you have lunch at the table,  
 S you must respect each other.  
 T how do you eat your food?  
 SS ((unint)) nicely

370 T eat nicely. Do you burp loudly?  
 SS no  
 T what must you say?  
 SS excuse me  
 T and when you yawn, what must you do?

375 SS cover your mouth  
 T so all this shows-  
 S courtesy  
 T you are a well-mannered person. If you are well-mannered, would you be liked?  
 SS yes?

380 T will people like you?  
 SS yes  
 T yes, of course. Ah: cheerful? ((refers to what she wrote earlier on b/b)) No problem, right?  
 SS no problem

385 T is everybody cheerful?  
 SS yes  
 T are you cheerful?  
 SS yes  
 T everyday?

390 SS no  
 T are you cheerful sometimes?  
 SS yes  
 T ok, the last thing about the similarities?  
 SS colour/colour is wrong

395 T all right, you look at your book, and see if she said anything about art  
 SS no ((unint. Tr leaves sts to read and discuss with each other))  
 Yes/she wants to become art teacher.  
 T yes

400 T Ok, what are the difficult words in the passage?  
 ((she writes on the b/b as sts list the words  
 "Complimented  
 Aggressive  
 Violent" ))

405 All right, if you don't have your dictionary, may be you try and guess. Let's look at the sentence with the word 'complimented'. <She is not the first person who has complimented me on my good manners.> Is she saying something good?

SS ya/yes

T she said Sumei is very kind – so what is she doing? Guess. What's the word?

SS ((unint))

410 T ok, let's say I say this boy is a very good boy. He is very well-mannered, very helpful. I am complimenting him. I am?

SA5 praising him

T yes! Compliment is praise. Very good. What about aggressive? <I dislike rude people and I'm afraid of people who are aggressive.>

415 SS fierce/strong

T you are strong, you are very forceful. You can be very hostile. Are gangsters very aggressive? Or can they be aggressive? What do they do sometimes?

SS they beat people up/they look for trouble/very rude

T not only are they very rude, they?

420 SS fought. Fought

T they fight. Yes.

Ok, the last piece of work. Do you all have rough books?

SS yes/no

Rough paper can?

425 T ok, rough paper will do. I want you to write- now, from tomorrow, you bring me a book where- it can be a Primary school exercise book that you did not use- for rough work. Ok? I don't need you to go and buy a new book.

S tcher, write in the diary, can?

T if you want to write in the diary if there's space, then do so.

430 Um, ok, get back to your places. ((sts return desks to their desks which are still in pairs))

I want you to say in four lines- write something- guess something about your friend next to you- don't look at each other's work- and your friend will write something about you. Ok? Do that and nothing else. If you don't have anything else, look at your diaries and see if there is space in your diaries ((sts are giving blank sheets of paper to those who have nothing to write on. They look around and do not begin writing. They appear lost))

435 Just write anything about your friend- four to five lines, ok?

((sts talk with each other as they locate stationary. SB1 leans over to SC1's desk to clarify task instructions))

440 You don't need to talk or discuss at this point. Write about your friend next door. Close your textbooks and put them away.

S tcher, use 'I'?

T pardon?

445 S write 'I'?

T you write 'I'- you pretend you are him ((their partner for pairwork)). Right, I'm going to count to three, and then you must keep quiet. One, two, three, silence. ((sts fall quiet, and gradually begin their work))

Right, so tomorrow you must have your?

450 SS dictionaries

T ((tr walks around helping a student with spelling))

yes, try to bring a rough book. It can be your Primary school book where you have some pages left.

SC2 tcher, how to do? ((st asks TD as she walks by her desk))

455 T how to do? Imagine you are your friend, and say 'I like' whatever – 'to play soccer'.

SC2 tcher, cannot ((st says she cannot do the task))

T try your best  
 SC2 very hard ((i.e. she finds the task very difficult))  
 T very hard? Ok just try. ((tr takes a few minutes to explain, semi-privately, how the  
 460 task should be done, and then continues to walk around the class. Some sts finish the  
 task and begin to put away their book. At this point she stops at my table and has a  
 short conversation with me about how she is surprised at their low level of linguistic  
 competence))  
 T ok, you've finished right?  
 465 SS yes  
 T ok, since you've been very good today, I let you go- keep quiet, listen to me ((sts fall  
 silent))  
 Close your books. Get back to your place so that you can go for recess. ((sts move  
 desks and chairs back to original position))  
 470 T do you think you have done this quietly?  
 SS no  
 T tomorrow, if this happens again, I'll put you back in your pairs ((again and again))  
 until you can do it quietly. ((tr tells SC1 to clean the board, and SB1 to switch off  
 fans and lights. The bell for recess goes. Sts stand to thank tr but she does not initiate  
 475 the closure by saying, 'Thank you, class'. She is instead watching the b/b being  
 cleaned. Sts seem unsure if they should leave or if they can indeed leave. They look  
 uncomfortable, wanting to go for recess but hesitate, as they have not thanked the tr.  
 They eventually leave))



## Appendix H: Lesson Summaries

I take as basic units of analysis firstly, instances of classroom behaviour, and secondly, instances of comments on the significance of this behaviour on broader aspects of meaning, from the perspectives of the teachers and students involved. It follows therefore that when analysing English lessons, my immediate focus is on (patterns of) behaviour, both in the form of frequent and rare events. In the summaries of each lesson below, I aim therefore to include only that information pertaining to teacher and student behaviour, recurrent interaction episodes, recurring themes, as well as tentative interpretations of data. These summaries are drawn from the 28 audio-recordings and observation notes.

### Key to abbreviations used:

tr	teacher
st(s)	student(s)
b/b	blackboard
bk	book

### Class B

#### LB1 (Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> January, 8.40 - 9.15 am)

Most of the lesson is teacher-talk.

Numerous st-questions show their attentiveness and eagerness to confirm instructions.

Tr-sts negotiate at length over type and colour of reading files.

Tr reminds sts repeatedly about what they have to bring for the next lesson.

#### LB2 (Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> January, 12.05 – 1.15 pm)

First teaching lesson of the year.

Tr provides very clear classroom instructions on 'timeline' activity, with examples written on b/b. Instructions are also repeated several times.

Sts question to confirm their tasks.

Tr establishes and maintains her authority by frequently disciplining class (through telling and reminding them how she expects them to behave), by setting limits (on, for e.g. time spent discussing topics), by reminding sts what they have to bring for the next lesson.

Sts sometimes determine, through bringing up topics, what the class discusses.

Sts affect the content of the lesson by:

- asking tr questions readily without being prompted
- contributing to class discussions without tr's solicits
- making suggestions
- complaining that they cannot hear their classmate reading an article

Sts appear to play 'good sts' by confirming what they need to bring for the next lesson, and by being quick to fall silent whenever the tr issues a new rule regarding classroom behaviour, or provides a discipline ultimatum.

### **LB3 (Wednesday, 10<sup>th</sup> January, 10.20 – 10.55 am)**

Tr provides pep talk, persuading sts to improve their English, telling them to make it their new year's resolution, and asking them to share with the class things they could do to improve their linguistic competence.

Tr tells sts in passing that they will be punished if their reading files are not ready on time.

Tr describes English lessons of the future, talking about newspaper article sharing and reading periods at length. She seems to want to whet their interest and expectations for the latter.

Sts, particularly the boys, enthusiastically contribute during newspaper article sharing activity and grammar discussion.

At end of lesson, tr distributes 2 handouts: one on 'Class Routines' and the other on 'Strategies for Success', telling sts to paste them in their grammar exercise bks.

### **LB4 (Reading Period, Thursday, 11<sup>th</sup> January, 12.40 – 1.15 pm)**

Newspaper article sharing is by now an established lesson activity.

A relaxed classroom atmosphere appears to be taking hold as some sts walk around relatively freely, speak to each other while the tr talks, speak Malay and Mandarin, and occasionally even bounce a basketball. The tr does not comment on these, and appears to be comfortable with a relaxed classroom management style.

Not all sts though are comfortable as during the lesson, some sts attempt to control the noise level of class, saying “*Shh!*” and “*Keep quiet!*”, and also manage themselves by proposing a more efficient way of returning extra pages of material (being distributed to them) to the tr.

#### **LB5 (Friday, 12<sup>th</sup> January, 8.40 – 9.50 am)**

Tr begins the lesson by informing the sts that they will be doing dictionary work, but these plans are derailed when, after she asks sts for their grammar homework, she hears that not everyone has done it. She spends 20 minutes of the lesson going through in fine detail the handouts on ‘Class Routines’ and ‘Strategies for Success’ (which she distributed to the class in LB3). As part of the list of ‘Class Routines’, she tells the class that she would accept them not handing in their homework provided they inform her and they have a good reason. This warms the sts tremendously to her. From their response, it seems that this is the first time a tr has said this to them. SC5 goes as far as declaring to the class that TB is “*the best tr in the world!*”.

Sts display their competitive spirit: they firstly compare themselves to (and compete with) their rivals next door, Secondary 1A, and secondly are eager to know after all groups have presented their work, which group has created the best story.

The noise level is high during group work, but the tr, saying nothing, does not seem to mind.

Again, sts practice self-management, attempting to lower the noise level by saying “*Shh!*”, “*Quietlah!*”, “*Everybody shut up!*”. At one point during group work, a st complains, “*Tcher, too noisy, tcher!*”, but the tr, marking exercise bks at her desk, does not respond. Sts also remind each other to “*Speak English only!*” when Malay or Mandarin is heard.

#### **LB6 (Monday, 15<sup>th</sup> January, 12.05 – 1.15 pm)**

Sts tune into lesson, eagerly volunteering to read the text and to provide responses in the tr-led question-answer session that follows.

Tr sets sts written work, providing extremely detailed instructions and explanations as to how she expects the work to be done.

Sts question tr, checking if they have understood instructions.

Tr responds by providing example answers, showing sts how their answers should be presented.

After these class explanations, some sts approach the tr at her desk to privately confirm what they have to do. Some go after beginning their work, taking their exercise books to the tr and asking to check if they are doing their work as instructed.

TB patiently attends to them, although her earlier explanations have already provided the required information.

Lesson proceeds smoothly and systematically, with tr providing goals for each activity and ample instructions and guidance.

After issuing sts work, tr sits at her desk, leaving sts to get on with their work, unsupervised. She does not correct sts who are obviously not working and chatting with their friends.

**LB7 (Wednesday, 17<sup>th</sup> January, 10.20 – 10.55 am)**

Tr begins the lesson saying they will be doing thesaurus work, but then complains that not all sts have handed in their comprehension written work (from the previous lesson) which they had to complete at home. Tr reminds sts of the importance of following 'Class Routines' – stressing that they must do their homework, and that if this is not possible, they must inform her so.

She returns their corrected comprehension work, focusing on how sts have to fill in the details of their assignment in their 'Contents' page. She goes through common mistakes and tells sts how she wants corrections done, providing examples of correct answers.

Sts ask a variety of questions regarding exactly how corrections should be done.

Between them, TB and sts cover every detail, with TB once again bringing the lesson back to a discussion of 'Class Routines'.

When, in the last 5 minutes, the tr finally introduces the planned lesson by talking about the uses of the thesaurus, sts are quick to stop chatting amongst themselves and pay attention.

It seems that both tr and sts are partaking of a classroom culture that places a very strong emphasis on following procedure, so as to do things right.

#### **LB8 (Friday, 19<sup>th</sup> January, 8.40 – 9.20 am)**

Lesson continues from the previous lesson with thesaurus work.

Sts appear restless: they sing and hum to themselves, drum their fingers on desks, rest their head on desk, etc without any reaction from the tr.

There are sufficient enthusiastic contributions to keep the lesson going. Sts seem to always have one ear on what the tr is saying as they are able to contribute to the lesson even while having private conversations amongst themselves.

When the tr issues homework through clear and detailed instructions, outlining how sts must do the work, they still ask more questions to confirm and clarify instructions.

Generally, it seems that sts seem bored and unchallenged by the lesson.

#### **LB9 (Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 12.05 – 1.15 pm)**

Tr asks sts for their diaries: they had to decorate its cover and write two entries on topics supplied by tr. Some sts hand in diaries without the cover decorated. Their diaries are returned so that they have "*a second chance*" to decorate them.

Tr returns comprehension exercise books and sts are eager to know how they did, and their performance compares with that of their classmates.

Sts approach her desk one by one, asking her why their answers had been marked wrong, and how to do corrections.

TB attends to a few sts, and then decides to go through the correct answers with the whole class. She also checks that sts know how to fill in the details of the assignment in the 'Contents' page.

Tr distributes handout entitled 'Abbreviations for Composition Marking', and goes through each symbol and abbreviation, confirming that sts understand what these refer to, so that they will understand how their compositions are corrected.

Tr tells sts to write composition entitled "*Some Vivid Memories of My Childhood*", writing this title on the b/b. She explains the format of the composition exam sts will have to sit for their first exam in five months. She then tells them that as she wants to gauge their writing standard, she does not want to give them too much guidance or help.

Sts are left to write their composition. Some ask questions regarding word-length of composition and when it is due. Upon hearing that they have until Wednesday, sts seem to relax. There is much talking, movement and play, and sts are able to get away with this.

**LB10 (Wednesday, 24<sup>th</sup> January, 10.20 – 10.55 am)**

Tr begins lesson by collecting sts' composition books. When she is told that some sts have not completed their work, she simply tells them to bring it the next day.

Tr returns corrected grammar work: all sts, having misunderstood instructions, supplied responses in the form of indirect speech instead of direct speech. TB tells the class that they have to redo the exercise for homework. Tr seems constant in her attention to instructional details, emphasising structure and procedure, that work has to be done in a certain way.

When class discusses reading period the next day, sts display their enthusiasm, asking many questions regarding what kinds of story books they will be allowed to bring for future reading lessons, how they will do book reviews, etc.

The lesson content is, like some lessons before, more focused on procedure than on language teaching.

**LB11 (Reading period, Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> January, 12.40 – 1.15 pm)**

Sts are told to first read the 10 pages of a story that they had been given (and started reading) the week before, and to then answer a series of comprehension questions based on the story.

The noise level is high, and sts are restless, and talk amongst themselves. There is much movement and distraction. They appear uninterested in the story, uninspired and bored. Many of them finish reading the story fairly quickly, and chat with their friends. Some sts attempt to manage the others, by saying “*Shh!*”, “*Shut up*”, “*Sit down*”, “*Tcher, he is not reading!*”. The tr does not react.

Sts do however fall quiet, and make like they are reading the story whenever the tr paces the class.

Only at the end of the lesson when TB, in discussing the story, gets sts to volunteer personal accounts about their untidy bedrooms, do sts tune into the lesson.

Tr is constant in her focus on procedure by checking if sts know how to fill in the ‘Contents’ page for their reading file.

#### **LB12 (Friday, 26<sup>th</sup> January, 8.40 – 9.50 am)**

Tr provides sts with the next 2 topics for diary entries, telling sts to be honest in their entries, and informing them that better entries will be published in the school newspaper. I found it strange that ‘diary writing’ which is meant to be private can be published for others to read. (What is ‘diary writing?’)

Sts are very motivated during group work, eagerly working out answers to questions that tr has written on the b/b. Once again there is little noise control.

During tr-fronted discussion, sts contribute freely and enthusiastically. There is strong tr-st negotiation as tr accepts and listens to st contributions, often letting these direct discussion.

Tr does though seem more assertive during group presentations when at one point, she tells sts to ‘shut up’ and listen to their classmate who can barely be heard.

Instructions for homework at the end of lesson are as usual, clear and thorough.



## **Class D**

### **LD1 (Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> January, 8.40 – 9.50 am)**

First teaching lesson for the year.

Task instructions are unclear, but sts don't seek clarification.

Teacher-talk is centred mainly on providing instructions for text-based exercises, discipline and Q & A teaching activities/episodes.

Tr stresses discipline which appears to get sts to behave well and keep quiet.

There is no formal closure to the lesson - sts stand to thank tr, but tr does not respond.

### **LD2 (Friday 5<sup>th</sup> January, 7.30 – 8.40 am)**

Lesson begins with tr once again informing class that she is not Mrs (TD) but Mdm (TD).

She checks if sts have brought their dictionaries (each pair must have a dictionary on the table, and they do).

Although there are instances when sts are lost as to what they have to do, instructions seem more detailed and careful, and sometimes come with examples. During text-based exercises, tr checks if sts understand the meaning of difficult words, and instructions.

Sts use Malay during group work, seem unmotivated and uninspired, and prefer to chat and tease each other. As the tr is mostly stationed at her desk, they are able to get away with this.

Tr informs sts that they have to bring wrapped (with paper and decorated) diary and a personal photograph or sketch.

Lesson closes with a muffled 'thank you', and with no reminders from the tr as to what sts must bring the next lesson.

### **LD3 (Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> January, 11.30 – 12.05 pm)**

Tr provides clearer instructions (more examples, confirmations, repetitions) and checks if sts have understood instructions both during and between activities. She seems to be more aware that she needs to repeat instructions regarding tasks and that they need to be reminded of what to bring the next lesson.

Sts seem more daring, talking whenever they can get away with it.

Sts are assigned to design outfits, working in groups. They are slow to get on task, and in most groups, some members are clearly working harder than others. Sts seem more on task when the tr circulates from group to group.

Tr is constant in the way she stresses discipline:

sts are made to stand at the start of the lesson for being noisy;  
those who do not hand in diaries have to attend remedial class;  
tr takes down names of sts who have forgotten to bring their textbooks.

She also tells the class to “*shut up*” several times.

The lesson closes with tr reminding the class to bring their diaries the next day – saying that those who fail to do so will have to stay back (for as long as she does) after school.

#### **LD4 (Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> January, 8.05 – 9.15 am)**

The lesson begins with sts having to continue their task (designing an outfit) from the lesson before. They work in groups and present their outfits to the rest of the class.

When they are told to write a 12-line diary entry on the topic ‘My English Teacher’, they seem unclear, and somewhat lost as to what to write. However, they do not say much, and the situation continues until the tr enquires why they are not writing. A st says she does not know what to write, as she does not really know her tr.

Tr uses the language of ‘police and thief’ – her sts have broken the law and she will catch them. Sts are made to stand for using Malay in class, and the tr threatens to speak to them in Punjabi in return. She tells them to stop talking (“*Don’t write with your mouth!*”) and that she will be watching certain groups in future as she has noticed that they don’t work.

She also asks the monitor and monitress for a class-seating plan which will enable her to call sts by their names. There is none available and she tells them to make her one.

#### **LD5 (Reading Period, Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> 10.55 – 11.30 am)**

Tr returns 3 diaries because sts wrote entries shorter than the stipulated 12 lines. Sts have to lengthen their entries before she will accept their work.

Some sts are made to stand for talking and being playful.

Sts have to read their story book which they pick from a selection the tr has brought to class. They read or make like they are reading only when she paces the class, but are quick to slip a word to a friend or to give their attention to something else as soon as her back is turned.

A st stands (as punishment for speaking Malay) - first in front of the class, facing his classmates, and then because this distracts the class, he has to stand facing the b/b. He reads his story book, every now and then, as he stands.

The tr comments that she notices them forcing themselves to read, instead of trying to enjoy the experience. From time to time she monitors the class from her desk, checking if sts are reading. Only in the last 10 minutes of the period, does the talking and distraction fall to minimal as sts finally focus on their individual reading.

At the end of the lesson when the tr asks how many of them enjoy reading, most of the sts raise their hands. I wonder if they therefore do not read because of the fact that they have little choice in what they are reading or that they find it difficult to concentrate on their book because there are too many distractions around.

The tr continues to assert her authority using the language of threat.

#### **LD6 (Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> January, 8.40 – 9.50 am)**

Lesson begins with the tr asking sts for their diaries. She does not believe that all sts have handed in them in, and tells them that they had “*better tell*” her straight away. Those who have not given her their diaries are asked to stand, and the tr asks each st in turn for their reason. She writes their names on the b/b, telling one of them who’s excuse is that he forgot to write his entry, that it is unacceptable, and that he’ll have to stay back after school to finish it.

The tr goes through the pile of diaries to confirm that she has everyone’s, and discovers that one diary is still missing. This is traced to a st who is then made to stand at the front door, facing the wall for 10 minutes.

Tr warns a st who does not yet have a textbook that if he does get one by the next lesson, she will tell the discipline master to announce it at morning assembly.

Disciplinary threats continue throughout the lesson, and this appears to position sts on the outside, and set-up barriers to learning.

Instructions for written work are clear, as the tr provides details about what sts have to do and waits for them to carry out the first set of instructions before providing them with the next set. Her teaching vocabulary seems to sometimes stretch beyond the productive and receptive capacity of sts (egs: ‘marital status’, ‘occupation’, ‘internal bleeding’, ‘what do you gather from’), but sts do not ask for meaning or say that they do not understand.

#### **LD7 (Friday 12<sup>th</sup> January, 7.30 – 8.40 am)**

Lesson is a focussed grammar lesson with the tr providing close supervision and strong procedural guidance – instructions are clear and systematic, and go beyond information on how to do exercises to include more practical information on how and where sts should write the date, etc.. She checks if sts have understood what they have to do.

Sts are tuned into the lesson, and seem more motivated to contribute to class discussion.

As sts are doing a written task which requires them to describe their (pair work) partners' likes and dislikes, they ask and clarify with partners, taking the noise level up. TD reacts by telling them to guess what their partner likes to keep noise level down to a minimum. The activity becomes less authentic, and sts seem less motivated.

Lesson closes with tr asking a few sts one by one to tell the class what they have to bring for their next lesson, thereby reminding the rest of the sts. She also reminds them of the words they have to learn for their spelling test.

#### **LD8 (Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> January, 10.55 – 11.30 am)**

When sts are returned their grammar exercise books, they are eager to find out how they fared and, when they see that some of their answers have been marked incorrect, some of them want to know why. They approach the tr at her desk.

Tr gives them clear instructions as to how she wants them to fill the 'Contents', then goes through the correct answers, telling them where and why they went wrong. She does not provide instructions regarding how she expects corrections to be done beyond saying "*I want all corrections done correctly*".

There is more of the by now common lesson feature of st-policing: they are made to stand when caught using Malay. There is a point in the lesson when sts show that they have come to understand the 'wrong' in speaking Malay: the class noise level is up, and the tr asks in a stern voice, "*Who is speaking Malay?*" which immediately silences the class.

She continues to refer to sts by 'you' or 'the last boy at the back' or 'the one with the blue pencil case'. She asks again for the class-seating plan and is informed by the monitress that it is still not ready.

#### **LD9 (Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> January, 8.05 – 9.15 am)**

For this composition lesson, sts are told to take out a new exercise book, to skip the first page, entitle the second page 'Contents' page, and to fill in - under item number 1 - "*Myself*". They are to begin their work on the next page, by first pasting their photograph and then writing about themselves. Step-by-step procedural instructions are clearly delivered, and the tr seems to have come a long way from her minimal instructional style in the first lesson.

She provides a few guidelines about composition writing, telling the class how for their composition, they can write about their likes and dislikes, and co-creating with sts, some

example sentences on the b/b. She uses words like ‘prominent’ which I am not sure the sts comprehend. She also provides a few vague instructions saying for *example* “*Whatever you do, write between 100-150 words*” – to which sts react with a gasp. There is little repetition of instructions. Sts are provided little actual composition writing guidance, and are not offered a rationale for this. They are left to write for the remainder of the lesson.

Sts are excited about the photos they have brought in, and after the tr’s instructions, they take some time to settle down to their task. They are interested to see each others, photographs and react with questions, laughter etc.. When they actually get on task, they seem to enjoy the physical task of cutting and pasting their photos.

The lesson ends with tr telling sts that they must give her their completed compositions after recess.

#### **LD10 (Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> January, 8.40 – 9.50 am)**

Lesson begins with tr telling sts to get into groups. She wants to call them by their name, and asks once more for the seating plan, and is told it is still not ready. The saga of the not-yet-prepared seating plan reveals interesting things about the tr who has let it carry on all this while and about the sts (monitor and monitress) who seem unable or unwilling to get it done.

Sts are given a task to do in groups and are told that when they present their work to the class at the end of the activity, each group will be awarded a mark (to be added to their ‘continuous assessment’ grade). Task instructions are, however, brief, and unclear – 3 specific instances during group work show that sts have not understood exactly what they ought to be doing. Yet, TD does not pick up on sts’ uncertainty, and eventually, when each group has to present their work, one is given a fail mark for not doing the task as instructed. This group is rather ironically, composed of sts who are generally more linguistically competent than their classmates. They appear visibly upset with the tr for they genuinely had misunderstood what they were meant to be doing. The tr does not reveal the precise mark that each group has been awarded, telling them that all groups except one have passed. She continues to withhold their marks even when a few sts, keen to know how they fared, ask her several times for them.

Tr is constant in her treatment of noise and sts speaking Malay in class – the class is made to stand because of the noise level, and at one point sts have to stand while they do group work.

At other points various sts are made to stand, and one is told to stay back after school to draw a sketch of himself as he has forgotten to bring a photograph for composition.

Sts are motivated by the task which is to do with listing the advantages and disadvantages of being first/middle/youngest child. They seem more enthusiastic when activities involve them personally.

Lesson ends with tr telling sts to write reminders in their diaries for what they need to bring for the next lesson.

#### **LD11 (Friday 19<sup>th</sup> January, 7.40 – 8.50 am)**

Lesson begins with a tension-filled episode when the tr punishes some sts who have been caught storing their texts in unoccupied desks at the back of the class.

For the lesson, sts first write a diary entry and then have to read their story books while the tr gets them to go up one by one to her desk so that she can ask them questions, and check if they indeed are reading their books.

The strongest feature of the lesson is the amount of disciplining that occurs. The tr flings a sts' book onto the floor, punishes sts by having them stand at the front door of the classroom, notes the names of offending sts, says that she is going to tell their form tr to change some of their seating positions.

There are two instances revealing that sts are uncertain of what they should be doing – one to do with what to write for their diary entry entitled 'English Lessons', and the second to do with completing a book review sheet based on a book they have read.

During silent reading, sts do not appear involved in reading, but do their best to pretend the opposite. They fall quiet when tr is vigilant and speak with classmates as soon as they can.

#### **LD12 (Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 11.30 – 12.05 am)**

Strong discipline is once again the predominant feature of the lesson. There is more language of threat: tr tells sts "*not to dare hand*" in their diaries if entries are less than 12 lines long, and some sts are made to stand during the lesson.

Tr encourages sts to contribute, and praises some sts for speaking well.

The class seating plan is finally ready, and given by the monitress to the tr.



**LD13 (Wednesday, 24<sup>th</sup> January, 8.05 – 9.15 am)**

Lesson begins with tr pacing the classroom (while sts prepare themselves), and telling me privately, *"I am aiming for more discipline and control"*. This is indeed what happens as during the lesson the tr hits a st with her text for talking, takes down the names of sts who have not brought their books, gets 2 sts to stand for using Malay, and threatens the class with *"no recess if you talk"*.

This apart, the listening comprehension lesson flows well. Indeed, this is one of the most gelled lessons to date. The activities take on a clear pattern – sts have to listen to a text (which is played twice), then answer questions based on the text in their workbooks. The class then goes through the correct answers orally first after which the tr writes the answer on the b/b. They do this sequence of activities several times and appear motivated, and confident of what they need to do at every stage.

The tr emphasises 'correct' procedure by checking sts' books to see if they have filled in the 'Contents' page and are doing their work as instructed.

**LD14 (Reading period, Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> January, 10.55 – 11.30 am)**

Lesson begins with tr distributing book review sheets, telling sts they can begin to work on their book review if/when they finish reading their book. She does not explain the review sheets, and some sts begin their book reviews, others continue reading their bk. Tr then returns st diaries and scolds those whose entries are too short or who have not submitted their diaries. These sts are told to stand and read. The lesson is again interrupted when the tr shows the class an example of a very good book review, and an example of a 'bad' book review. The latter was done by a st who obviously had not known how to complete a book review.

Through out the lesson, some sts go up to her at her desk to either change their story books, to read for her (so that she can correct their reading), or to ask her how they have to fill in the book review sheets. Only towards the end of the lesson, when sts have asked each other or her for clarification, does the tr explain how they should sts are to do book reviews.

The lesson ends with the tr reminding sts of what they have to bring the next day.

This is an example of a lesson going wrong - because of unclear instructions, and also because it is fragmented. Tr expects sts to guide themselves through the reviews, and this



seems beyond them. There is also a lack of focus as too many things are happening simultaneously.

**LD15 (Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> January, 8.40 – 9.50 am)**

Tr begins the lesson by disciplining sts, thereby establishing her authority. This seems to be a common approach of hers – first set the tone with firm discipline, for only then can the lesson proceed smoothly. A st is doing his Maths homework when she begins the lesson – she confiscates his Maths textbook. She tells another st that he will soon be moved to another desk because she is tired of “*all his rubbish*”.

The lesson is composed of 5 different activities, all of which are explained clearly. The tr takes the sts through each step-by-step, with close guidance, and the lesson flows smoothly. Sts are motivated, and focussed on the different tasks. Once again, they confidently volunteer contributions and answers.

As the lesson proceeds from activity to activity, the tr is sympathetic and jovial, telling sts to ‘be quiet’ instead of ‘shut up’. There appears to be a greater willingness to accept st contributions, and to give them room to determine how long the class will spend on a segment. She has started using the class-seating plan to call on sts to answer questions. Finally, her softer tone sees her more encouraging, using words like ‘excellent’ to describe st responses.

**LD16 (Friday 26<sup>th</sup> January, 7.30 – 8.40 am)**

Tr sets tone of lesson by relocating some sts to different parts of the class. She explains that these sts have to be moved because they talk or play too much where they are. All sts were told to bring their dictionaries and those who have forgotten to do so are made to stand. These sts also have to make 10 sentences for homework.

The lesson is composed of a series of different activities, but all systematically and clearly presented. When she sets them homework, she explains, with examples wherever appropriate, what they have to do. Like the lesson before, her approach seems, after the opening discipline sequence, softer and more compassionate. The kindness and repartee appear to be well received by the sts.

The close tr guidance sees once again an enthusiastic set of sts who seem mostly confident of what is expected of them, and keen to participate in lesson activities.

## Appendix I: Lesson Extracts

### 11. Extract B.CP.4 (from Lesson B5)

#### *'Strategies for Success' and 'Class Routines'*

The class has just returned from a Physical Education lesson. TB is sitting at her desk, waiting for students as they change out of their P.E. attire. Boys put on their school shirt over their T-shirt and girls do likewise, as well as put on a skirt over their shorts. Students are noisy and full of energy, with some boys teasing each other about their bodies. SD6 is humming and this, until the class settles down to silence, interferes with the audibility of the recording. Students gradually quieten as they prepare themselves for the lesson. TB waits for silence before speaking.

- T ok. Before we start, please hand in your grammar books. Row by row. ((sts take out their grammar exercise book))  
Row by row, ok. Just the front people collect.
- 5 T ok ((sts are speaking with each other, and TB notices some of them asking their neighbours questions as they rush to complete their homework and submit their bks))  
Ok, listen ((sts quieten))  
In future, if you are supposed to do homework, remember, homework is homework. Don't come to class, find out from your friend and then start to do.  
10 If you are not sure what you have to do, ask me before you do the work, understand? Not now, when you are about to pass up, then you ask your friends what to do.
- T Right, before I collect- ok. I think I did tell you the other day that I would like you to enter the 'Contents Page' ((sts have at this point put their books on her table))  
15 Each time- right- ok- why don't you take back your books first. Take back all your books. Take back row by row. You collect your books row by row, you pass up also row by row. Easier for me to return. ((front row sts collect bks from TB's desk and pass them back up the row))
- 20 T Ok. Right. The other day I gave you two pages right. One on 'Strategies for Success' and the other is the 'Class Routines'. Right. Let me just point out, because the other day, I gave you the- the reminders, but I did not have time to explain. ((unint)) I want you people to bear in mind, particularly some routines. I do not want to have to remind you every period. That's what I  
25 photocopied and everybody has a page of it. So that in cases when you are not sure of what to do, please refer back to the 'Class Routines', Ok?
- T Right, if you would just quickly refer back to your 'Class Routines', I would just like to remind you, before you hand in your books. Right, I told you the other day the first page is 'Strategies for Success' right? Refer back to  
30 'Strategies for Success'. Ok. I just want to remind- you people about class strategies, ok?

Right, number 1- <Constant work> Ok. I want you people to keep up with assignments and pay attention in class. Ok? So this is a very useful reminder. That's how you get good marks ((unint)) Every work you do-

35 Teacher's explaining- you listen. Don't ever talk when the teacher is explaining. Not only you will not understand, it is also very rude. Ok? You people are in Express ((i.e. the Express stream)), you people must be very polite. It's not the Express, right. Politeness is very very important. You don't measure a person according to your certificates, ok. You measure a person

40 according to your behaviour, your manners. Very important- please behave yourselves, huh.

T Right, number 2- <Seek help if you are not sure of anything> Ask the teachers. If you are not sure of anything, feel free. You can see me and ask me to explain. I will explain again, ok. Do not be shy, do not be afraid. We all- we

45 will not eat you up or whatever, right? May be- unless you do something wrong, then the teachers will scold you. If you don't do anything wrong why should we scold you? You think that is our favourite past time, is it? Teachers enjoy to scold you, is it? We don't enjoy scolding. Personally, myself- I don't enjoy scolding or nagging at you people- unless you misbehave, right? So if

50 you don't want teachers to scold you, you behave yourselves, ok?

T Number 3- <Be organised> Ya, this is important. Make sure your work is neat. Make sure you've got good- good time management. I think this I have to stress. Last week, I told you that in secondary school, it's important for you to learn how to manage your time. Or else, you will always say "no time, no

55 time, no time". Ok? So learn how to manage your time.

T Right. Number 4- <Dog determination> What's that? Determination here does not mean like a dog, you work like a dog. ((sts laugh)) Anyone can guess? What do you think it means by dog determination? ((sts mumble amongst themselves))

60 The explanation here is already quite clear, right? ((TB reads from the handout)) <If at first you don't succeed, try again> That is determination. Some people- they don't succeed the first time, they give up. They don't want to do any more. They don't love the subject. That's not right. Give it a try. If the first time you don't succeed, you try again. You never know right, once

65 you get the hang of it, and then that's it, right? Just like when we were calculating the timeline, isn't it? ((tr is referring to a timeline activity done by the class in Lesson B2)) Maybe with practise, you'll get the hang of it. ((unint))

Some people don't like Maths. Right. They don't like. They just cannot figure it out. The moment they see Maths, they see stars- ((some sts laugh))

70 SF4 tcher, I like Maths-

T keep on trying. Ya. Maths is a subject, once you get the hang of it, huh, you'll love the subject. Once you love the subject, you'll know how to do it, right? Ok?

75 Right- so those are very useful reminders.

T Right, I would like to point out what I want- to point out to you regarding class routines. Your 'Class Routines' applies to all our lessons. Ok? Right, let us look at the "Class Routines" number 1- <Write title, date, and topic for every piece of assignment>. ((here, TB is referring to the how students present their actual assignments, not to the 'Contents Page')) Every piece, you have the date. The other day we had a meeting. The HOD ((Head of Department for English)) reminded us again that each piece of work must have a date because books will be checked by the HOD- maybe once a term. The books will be called in for checking and he is very particular about dates. So every piece of

80

- 85 work, make sure you have this- write your date, write the topic. Do it as best as you can.
- 90 T In other words, take pride. <Have pride in your work> ((item number 2 on list of 'Class Routines')) When you do your work, do it properly. Make sure it's neat and tidy. Don't just do your work anyhow. You know, last minute, five minutes before you go to sleep, just scribble here, scribble there. That's not the right attitude. You are in Sec.one. You learn the importance of doing your work with pride, so that at least you can say, "How nice, my book!". Even pasting- right, look at your book, beginning already so neat and tidy ((tr refers to the way sts have pasted the 2 handouts on strategies and routines in their exercise bks)) Even your father comes home, see, "Oh see, my son- my daughter, very good! See, very nice, very neat! Every page got 'Very good!'" ((i.e. 'Very good' as a remark from the tr)) Isn't it? Makes you feel happy. So take pride in your work.
- 100 T <Submit homework on time> ((Class Routine number 3)) Ya, today this is a good reminder. Some people, I think one or two, did not pass up ((when sts were told to hand in their books earlier, TB noticed a few of them not doing so)) Ok. 1A- I'm not praising, ok, but 1A the other day, homework, everyone passed up on time. That is a very good start. They are responsible and do their work. 1A must be the best class. Ok?
- 105 SS boo!/no! ((sts are not, as expected, pleased with being second to 1A))  
T 1A is the best, 1B is the better class. Ok? ((tr tries to appease sts))  
SS ((unint. sts do not seem to know how to react. Some laugh, pleased with what TB has said))
- 110 T right, I'm not praising my class. We try to be the best-  
S tcher, is 1A your class, huh? ((i.e. is 1A TB's from class?))  
SS ya loh/yes ((other sts answer before TB nods))  
S tcher, we very responsibility one- ((st tells TB that 1B sts are responsible))  
T ok, A and B both good-lah, ok? Right-  
S no, tcher, B better huh ((other sts laugh. So does TB))
- 115 T ok, B is the better, A is the best ((tr continues to tease the class))  
SS ok/yeh ((sts seem more willing to accept that they are 'better'))  
T ok, anyway, let's not argue- we must be friends, ok? Does not mean 1A 1B must not be friends, huh?
- 120 T Right. So have pride in your work, huh? Submit your work on time and if you need extension, sometimes- maybe- I know-. We understand sometimes- maybe you get a lot of work, right? We understand. You got 8 subjects and sometimes teachers give you all the homework same time. Then go home, you got to do Maths, got to do History, got to do Science, got to do English. And then you don't have the time. You know sometimes you people got tuition,
- 125 you got this and you got that. Very hard. Sometimes we understand. As long as you cannot hand it in, see the teacher, tell the teacher, "Very sorry, I cannot get it done". That is it. Then we understand. What we don't like is you just don't pass up. And then you never tell the teacher. And when we count the books, we see one short, two short, isn't it? I mean then we will be angry- but at least if you go to the teacher, say "Teacher, we are very sorry, I- I could not get it done because this this this this. I will pass it up tomorrow". I will understand. Ok? Clear?
- 130 S tcher, but then tcher will never believe us- ((other sts are quick to second this – saying that other trs would not understand and would not allow this))
- 135 T ok- very sorry- I'm not speaking for all, ok? For myself, as I said, at least if you come and tell me, "Teacher, I am very sorry". Just now one of the girls

came and told me, "Teacher, I forgot to bring my book". Ok fine. At least- at least I would not shout and say "Why are you like that!" Ok?

140 SE4 get this form teacher, very good huh ((st says that it would be very good if TB was their form teacher. Others make similar comments to each other))

T right, submit homework ok on time

S tcher, you very good, tcher!

SF4 tcher, you are the best teacher in the world!

SS yeh/ya ((sts support SF4's statement.))

145 SS ((unint))

S tcher, you know the Chinese teacher? ((st seems to want to comment on their Chinese teacher, who they have told me, is very strict))

SS ((unint))

T ok, never mind, let's start ((i.e. let's continue)). If we have time, I don't mind, ok.

150 T Right. Corrections- please correct ((unint)) before submission. Which means <Do corrections before you submit your work> ((Class Routine number 4)) Before you do a piece of work, make sure corrections are all done. Right- some students were asking me whether can use a green pen or whatever, right.

155 Maybe sometimes in Primary school teachers ask you to use green, right? Here cannot. We are not allowed to use green, ok?

SS huh? ((sts seem surprised))

L tcher, but our Science teacher ask us to use green

S Science fine, ok. But (Mr-P) normally tells us, "Do not tell the students to use green", ok?

160 SS ((unint. sts are again surprised and discuss amongst themselves, confirming what their Science tr had asked them to do))

S use normal pen, can what ((st tells the class that it's fine to use their normal pen for corrections))

165 T ok? Right, finally, <Record assignments>. Huh, this is the part- <Record assignments faithfully> ((this is the last item and the one which prompted TB to discuss 'Class Routines' as sts have to record details of their assignment in their Contents Page before handing in their work)) **Faithfully**. Whatever it is, faithfully- which means every piece of work-. We notice sometimes students need to be reminded. First, beginning January - very good. Every piece of work, you record faithfully. But February- up to fifty percent gone- ((i.e. by February, sts record only half their assignments in the Contents Page))

170 S unfaithfully

T right? And then, ya, become unfaithful. Become, you know, a traitor

175 S tcher, now not yet February

T then by October you become a ((unint.)) never record at all. Then when the HOD comes and checks your books, he say- normally the HOD checks 'Contents Page' first. And then see- "Beautiful! The work only stop until May. Half the year- honeymoon. Relax." ((Sts laugh at TB's comment))

180 like that we also get into trouble with the HOD. He will ask the teacher, "How come your- your class you only give work half the year?"

S tr, you don't tell him everyday you give test, huh? ((TB and sts laugh))

T no. So, I say, please keep up to date.

T I know some of them- some of you were asking me what to write for your Contents Page, right? You were given grammar homework, you were given different topics- so you can write on your contents page- ok ((tr writes on b/b:

185 " 1. My Timeline  
2. Using 'used to' to show comparisons ")

Number 1- 'My Timeline' and number 2- 'Using 'used to'.



190 SF4 tcher, you ask we all to bring comprehension, you know.  
 T yes, yes, we are doing comprehension. Be patient. This is the- ((TB continues to explain how to fill in the details of yesterday's grammar assignment)) yesterday's date, right? Yesterday's date, ok. ((she points to the b/b where she has drawn 2 columns, one for the topic and the other for the date)) So: 11<sup>th</sup>  
 195 huh? 11<sup>th</sup>. Both the same, 11 (i.e. both topics have the same date)). So settle your Contents Page. Settle your worksheets. Make sure they are pasted neatly. I do not want to see them coming out ((of exercise bks. sts who have not already done so, are now pasting their handouts neatly in their grammar exercise bks))  
 200 Right? Can the front please help me collect the books again. Ok? ((front sts wait for bks to come down the row))  
 Everything is settled? ((tr circulates looking at exercise bks. Sts try to neaten their work, filling in the Contents Page as instructed))  
 If you don't bring your book, you should tell me huh ((tr is still walking  
 205 around and repeats her earlier instruction)) We'll do the next piece of work. ((sts are talking amongst themselves))  
 Ok? Can we start? Right, just a reminder – although- although I said sometimes I accept explanations and excuses- but please don't make it a habit. Understand? ((unint as an aeroplane is flying by)) Are you ready?



## 12. Extracts illustrating Classroom Management in Class D

### Extract D.CM.4 (from Lesson D15)

*Student is caught doing maths homework*

- T what was he ((the boy in the sentence)) holding?
- SS book ((TD sees SE5 with his Maths textbook open, doing Maths exercises. She pauses to look at him. Most of the class follows her gaze. Busy writing, SE5 is unaware that he has become the centre of attention))
- 5 Why is my friend behind always so busy? He never does homework for people, and then does it in class. We all go to sleep before 12 o'clock, right? Preferably between 10, 11 and 12 o'clock, right?
- SS yes
- 10 T but he goes to work at 12 o'clock at night ((some sts laugh. TD approaches SE5. She seems to be suggesting that he does not do homework because he goes to work at midnight. I am not sure why she says this – i.e. of the bearing it has on the point she wants to make. It is clear though that she is angry with him for doing his homework in class))
- 15 Everyday, you've got to annoy me.
- SE5 Your Maths teacher wants you to do this homework right?
- SS nods ((unlike other sts being reprimanded, SE5 looks at TD somewhat defiantly. She takes his textbook away, and he looks angry))
- 20 SS Good, you tell your teacher, your book is gone. Who is your Maths teacher? (T-Maths)
- T (T-Maths), very good. Better still.
- You are forever disturbing my lesson.
- All right, next. (SE5) will answer this. ((TD uncovers the second question on the OHT: <What would he do next?> She hears a student read the question, replacing 'would' with 'had'))
- 25 What **would**- is it **had** or **would**?
- SS would
- T what would he do next?
- SE5 ((remains seated, and does not say anything))
- T you're so tired that you cannot stand up? ((SE5 stands))
- 30 T huh? What would he do next?
- SE5 go to sleep ((SE5 says this very loudly. I am surprised that he dares to, as his behaviour is almost confrontational))
- T uh, I think I can't hear you- you can shout louder ((TD reacts with sarcasm))
- 35 SE5 What would he do next?
- ((in a more normal volume)) go to sleep-ah ((the suffix 'ah' in Singaporean English is used to convey obviousness, i.e. the answer is obviously that the boy would go to sleep))
- T why do you say that?
- SE5 yawn ((i.e. because in the sentence, the boy yawns))
- 40 T huh?
- E5 yawn
- T ok, yawn. Any other possibility? Any other possibility?

SE5 turn off the light ((SE5 says this with an angry defiant voice. His answer is  
45 that he knows the boy will go to sleep because he yawns and turns off the light  
in the sentence))  
T ok. Turn off the light ((without being told to, SE5 sits, dragging his chair  
loudly))  
You don't show me the angry face, ok. I have the right to show you an angry  
face, not you.  
50 So class- can you answer questions by looking- examining the passage?  
SS yes

## Extract D.CM.5 (from Lesson D6)

*Students who have not handed in diaries: "You better own up now. If I catch you, your punishment will be double"*

- T Ok class, where are my diaries? Hand in all remaining diaries to me now ((a few sts place their diaries on her desk. TD looks at the diaries))  
I still don't think I have everyone's diary. Are all diaries in? If not, you better tell me now.
- 5 Stand up those of you whose diaries are not here
- SE5 ((stands)) tcher, I forgot to write
- T you forgot? No, it is not acceptable. You stay back after school today and finish it. When you give it to me, you can go home.  
Who else?
- 10 SD3 (SF5) ((SF5 is standing, but TD has not noticed him. So SD3 tells her that SF5 is standing))
- T Osman
- SF5 I haven't finish tcher
- T and you? ((asking SD4 who is also standing))
- 15 SD4 haven't finish
- T ((looks at SD1 expectantly, waiting for his excuse))
- SD1 didn't do
- T all you four will stay back and write this afternoon. You don't finish, you don't go home.
- 20 Who else?
- You better own up now. If I catch you, your punishment will be double.  
Monitor ((i.e. SB1)), go and bring all your diaries from my table downstairs.
- SB1 the staff room tcher?
- T nods ((monitor leaves for the staff room))
- 25 T who else? Don't waste our time. Tell me. ((she writes on the b/b the names of the four sts who have to stay back after school))  
Remember, for tomorrow, you have to bring a photo of yourself – we need it for compo. ((she reminds sts to bring a personal photograph for their composition lesson the next day. The monitor returns with the pile of student diaries.
- 30 T ok, let's see how many diaries you have there.  
Everybody stand. When I call your name, you can sit down. ((she reads the name on the cover of each diary. When she has read all diary covers, there are still 5 sts standing. Four have their names on the b/b and are told to sit. The sole st left standing is SA2))
- 35 Come here. You wasted all our time. Did you put your hand up? ((i.e. with the first 4 sts. SA2 shakes his head))
- T I told you to tell me. So stubborn! Go and stand at the door. ((st does as told))  
Face the wall - I don't want you to look at your friends. Stay there for 10
- 40 minutes. Time yourself. ((SA2 does exactly as told. 10 minutes later he is told to apologise to TD and the class for wasting their time. SA2 looks embarrassed, and with downcast eyes, says "sorry" and returns to his seat

## Extract D.CM.6 (from Lesson D14)

### *Diaries entries shorter than 12 lines*

- T now these people ((TD reads the names on 4 diaries that she has kept aside from the others))  
These, class, are stubborn people – people who don't understand instructions. People who don't understand English. Sts who are foolish. ((sts are by now quiet, everyone is paying attention))  
5 I have said a million times, you must write at least how many lines?
- SS 12!
- T look at this person, this is:? (SC3). Look at how **lazy** she is ((TD lifts SC3's diary so that the class can see the length of her entry. It is 4 lines long))
- 10 SS Wah! ((sts express their shock and surprise. This is an exclamatory equivalent to the English 'Wow!'))
- T no, you don't have to make any comments ((addressing the class in general. Tr returns SC3 her diary))  
Today, after school- ((TD sees SC3 about to add on to her entry, to lengthen it)) no, don't touch it now! You stay back after school to write some more.  
15 ((TD picks up the next diary))  
Then there is (SD3). She glares at (SD3) as she hands him his diary. She does the same with the two remaining diaries. You are not going to write anything now. You people will have to stay back after school. ((of the 4 sts, 2 are boys and 2 are girls. It is not often that girls are punished, even in TD's lessons))  
20 Now, those of you who have not finished your book, start reading now. ((As this is the weekly reading period, sts have their story books on their desks. Those who have finished reading their books are doing book reviews))  
Next, we are going to look at all those people who did not hand in their diaries  
25 ((she picks up a class list. On it, she has put a tick beside the names of sts who have handed in their diaries. She reads the names of 9 sts who have not given her their diary))  
I do not have the diaries of the following people. For every piece of work you give me, I will start ticking, and then I will catch those of you who do not give me your work. All these people stand.  
30 (SD6)  
SS absent ((i.e. SD6 has not come to school))  
T (SC3)  
SS absent
- 35 T next, (SA5) ((SA5 stands)), (SB2) ((SB2 stands. TD addresses SB2 who informed her about not handing in her diary earlier)) You came to see me so sit down.  
(SA3), (SB5), (SE3), (SB1), (SF3) ((sts stand))  
Ok, you will stand and read. None of you will sit down. ((all 6 sts stand for not having given TD their diaries. Whether they are standing or sitting, sts gradually settle down to either reading their books or doing their book reviews. Many speak to their neighbours as they organise themselves. Tr returns to her desk, from where she watches sts))  
40

### 13. Extracts illustrating Teacher Instructions in Class B

#### Extract B.TI.1 (from Lesson B2)

#### Timeline Activity (Listening comprehension exercise on Jennifer)

*"So you got to match the date and the event, ok? Clear?"*

- 5 T Like what we will be listening now- I will read to you- and you **match**. Listen very carefully. There are 5 dates, **5 dates**. You are supposed to listen- I will **read** to you and you will **listen- and you match**. You match the date with the event. For example, if I say '1983'- for yourself- it is the date you were born. This is the date, this is the event, ok? ((Tr points to the 'date' and 'event' that she has written on the b/b))
- 10 So you got to match the date and the event, ok? Clear? I will read- it's a very short article. I will read carefully, you **listen**. Ok? Are you ready? Just look at it first? Look at the- the dates, and look at the 5 events. Look at it first. I will read to you, and you will try to match. Ok?
- T Are you ready? Right. Listen to me first. I will read it twice, ok? First time I do not want to see anyone doing anything. Everybody listen. I will read **twice**. The second reading, then you start figuring it out. How to match. Are you all ready?
- 15 SS yes/((some sts nod))
- T ok. Right. ((tr reads passage - which students do not have - about Jennifer's life while sts listen attentively))
- T Right. I will read again slowly. Now look at the year and look at the events and draw a line to match. Just in pencil, inside your book, ok? ((sts get a pencil and TB reads the passage for the second time. When she stops reading, sts check their answers with each other. Tr circulates, checking sts' work, telling them that if they do not have enough room on the page, they can write on the next page. She does not at this point tell them if they have matched event to year correctly))
- 20 ok? Are you ready to listen again? Ok?
- 25 SS yes/((sts nod. TB reads the passage for the third time))
- T right. <Jennifer was born in the year 1984>
- 30 So if you look at the year there, you just indicate next to the event- right at the beginning of the timeline. <And Jennifer was 5 years old when her little brother was born> You have to do a little bit of calculation, huh? 5 years old. She was born in 1984, 5 years old.
- ((TB reads the rest of the passage, pausing after each sentence to provide sts with clues, helping them complete the timeline correctly))
- 35 Ok? I'll give you a few minutes to just figure out the matches.
- Are you able to figure it out? You want me to read one more time? ((i.e. a fourth time))
- SF4 no tcher. We don't need to read one more time ((i.e. sts do not need or TB to read the passage again))

## Extract B.TI.2 (from Lesson B5)

### *Instructions for group work (Create a story around 10 words)*

- T ok, for your very first piece of group work- listen, I will be writing about 10 words – 10 words on the board. Ok. I will write 10 words on the board- then I want you as a group, to try and figure out from the 10 words- to come up with a simple story.
- 5 SS huh? ((some sts have not understood TB's instructions and others who have explain to their classmates))
- T simple. 100 words from the 10 words. 10 words- come up with a short story-  
SS tcher, ghost story?/tcher, can start with our own story?
- 10 T no no no. The story, the story, how it begins and so on, will be based on the words I'm providing, ok?-  
S tcher, must use all uh? ((i.e. must they use all the words provided?))  
T yes, you must use all. Ok? I will write the words on the board. And I will give you about 10 minutes, ok.
- 15 T right, I- I will group like this. Your first two rows make two groups huh- in other words, the first 3 and the first 3 go together, and the last and the last go together. Here also 6-6. Here also. ((tr gesticulates as she directs sts. She wants two rows to combine, with the front 3 sts of each row making up a group of 6 and the back 3 sts making another group of 6))
- 20 SF4 tcher, we like that can or not? Like that? ((st points across 3 rows. He wants to make a group that cuts across three rows so that his friends will be together))  
T no no no. This way ((gesticulating with her hands)) Now, **quietly** ((sts rearrange their desks and chairs to form groups, and make a lot of noise as they do so))  
Ok. Now. This is the first time you get into groups but in future, please  
25 remember, please get it done very quickly and very very quietly. You understand? ((tr writes the 10 words on the b/b))  
S tcher, no problem  
T now, I am giving you only 10 minutes. Look at the words on the board. From the words here, could you as a group come up with just a short story? Ok?
- 30 SS tcher can/can ((i.e. sts can do the task))  
S quiet-lah ((st is settling down to task and says this to noisy classmates))  
T right. One person write up, one person present ((i.e. each group must have a writer and a presenter. TB moves from group to group, asking sts if they have selected a group representative. She then sits at her desk and attends to her  
35 own work))

### Extract B.Tl.3 (from Lesson B6)

*Instructions for comprehension homework: "I will write the instructions, for comprehension- because this is your very first piece of work."*

- 5 T right, you have to be very careful ok. Right. I want you think carefully, what I want you to do for written work will be questions 1 to 5 for 'B'. Just think first. <Reading for Meaning> questions 1 to 5, right. And then you look for the next one under 'A', ok <A. Reading for Detail> Right, I will write down on the board what are the different questions you have to do but for comprehension- ok, I will write the instructions, for comprehension- because this is your very first piece of work, right. ((tr writes on b/b:  
" Reading for Meaning: Qtns 1 – 5  
Reading for Detail 1 )))
- 10 T Normally grammar, I told you people that every piece of work must have a title, right? And the date. When I looked just now when I was marking the grammar, some people didn't have the title and date, right? So please be more careful with your work- every piece of work must have title and date, right? Instructions- you must copy instructions, ok? Right, comprehension- what is the procedure? For comprehension? ((sts are generally paying attention, although a few are talking amongst themselves))  
Right, everyone please follow, huh. Write down the title. Write the title "Off to Hospital" 'A'. Right, questions- if you have- 'A' you have 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Do not copy questions. Do not copy questions. ((tr writes on b/b:  
20 " 1. Do not copy questions )))  
In other words, answer straight away. Number 2, answer in complete sentences ((TB writes on b/b:  
" 2. Answer in complete sentences )))  
Ok, these are the two things I want you to remember. You need not copy questions, answer straight away. Number 2, your sentences must be in complete sentences. I don't want to see one word, one word. Ok.?
- 25 SE4 no lifting ((sts preparing for the PSLE – the national exam that sts sit sat for at the end of Primary 6 - are generally taught that their answers cannot be constituted of phrases lifted from the passage. SE4 reminds TB of this rule))
- 30 T right, if you want to lift, as long as it is according to the question, it's ok-  
SE4 can uh, tcher? ((st seems surprised))  
T you can use- of course the best is to use your own words, right? Ok, what I would like you to do is- to do the questions. Ya, another reminder is ((tr writes:  
35 " 3. Leave a line after each answer )))  
Clear? Leave a line after each answer. Ok – what must you do?
- SC5 page what tcher? ((SC5 prompts TB to provide the page numbers of the exercises. She responds by writing on the b/b:  
" Do B Q 1 to 5 (page 10)  
40 A Q 1 to 4 (page 11) )))
- T ok. You look carefully huh- page 10 and page 11. Ok clear? So it's together 9 questions- all together. How do you do 'D'? Just quickly turn to the- page 12, page 12 now. <Looking at Words> Look at D. Look at D. ((sts do as told))



- 45 Right, we read the passage, we came across some words ok, now lets try to figure out the meaning of the words. For example, what's 1? ((sts are quick to read and supply the answer))
- SS pyjamas
- T loose clothing worn at night?
- SS pyjamas
- 50 T uh huh, right. So you have to look for the word that is in the passage. The definition is given but the word - you have to look for in the passage. We will try one more- what about <searched>?
- SD6 eh, don't play-play lah ((st uses a Singaporean expression, telling sts around him not to 'play-play' or fool around))
- 55 S hunting
- T **searched**
- SS hunt
- T searched ((stressing the past tense))
- S hunted
- 60 T hunted right. You've got to look for the exact word – it has to be the exact word. What about <small stones>?
- SS pebbles
- T very good. Pebbles. What about <move suddenly and quickly>? Right? ((sts don't seem to know))
- 65 T a word that starts with a 'd'. 'd'.  
darted ((tr writes 'darted' on b/b))
- S oh, darted.
- T right. So after you have done this, go on to do numbers 1 – 10. ((she writes on b/b:
- 70 “ D, nos 1 to 10 ”  
under previous list of B and A))
- SF4 tcher, why so many tcher? ((this is not a real quetsion. Rather, the st is complaining that TB is giving them too much homework. TB ignores his comment. Yet, SF4 appears to accept the fact that he has to do it for even as he complains, he is copying what TB has written on the b/b into his diary))
- 75 T right, how do you do this one? When you do the meanings? ((sts are silent))  
right, like this. When you do the meanings like this. ((she begins writing on b/b:
- “ Looking at Words ”))
- 80 Looking- right, only copy the heading. <Looking at Words> Right, then you write down number 1, loose clothing- copy down the definition, <worn at night in bed>. Ok, like this. Then you put a dash, understand?
- SS ((most sts nod))/oh I see
- T put a dash. Huh, like this, then you provide the- word.
- 85 T right, ok? Like this. And number 2, yes, <searched> put a dash- what is your word? Hunted. Ok. Clear? Like that. ((tr has written on b/b:
- “ Looking at word  
loose clothing worn – pyjamas  
searched – hunted ”))
- 90 T right, any questions for your work? Whatever you can do now, you do now, ok? Whatever you cannot, do as home-
- SF4 =tcher, all do in comprehension book, uh?
- T yes, in comprehension book. Start on the first page. Write the title first. ((sts take out their comprehension exercise bk. They ask each other questions, clarifying task instructions))
- 95 S tcher, comprehension book, correct huh?

T yes, comprehension book ((sts begin to work))  
ok, whatever can be done now, please do now. Read back the passage  
properly. ((i.e. read the passage carefully again))  
100 SF4 tcher, do now uh tcher?  
T yes. Whatever can be done now, do now.

## Extract B.TI.4 (from Lesson B7)

### Instructions for Doing Corrections and Frequent Student Questions

- T ok- Right- Before we proceed to do a little bit of dictionary work, I have returned your grammar books...((TB has asked several sts to distribute the bks to the class. On receiving their bks, sts eagerly flip through their work to see how they have fared))
- 5 Right. Let me explain. Some of you- I have written 'see me'. Ok. And 'seen'.  
((tr writes these on b/b:  
" see me  
seen ")
- 10 Right. I did remind you people about titles. Ok. Every piece of work- you **must** have a title. And I think the other day we did 2 different piece of work. One on the timeline and the one on sentences using 'used to'. And I think for those people who I wrote 'see me' – it's because you did **not** write the title. Every piece of work, for example using 'used to' - I gave you instructions to make 5 sentences using 'used to' to show comparison. So you have to copy
- 15 the instructions. Ok? So make the habit of- remember- every piece of work **must be accompanied by the title**. Clear? I have given you the 'Class Routine' right? That's not for show you understand? You have a photocopy each- and you are supposed to refer to it if you are not sure. At the top of it I have written every piece of work must have a title.
- 20 T Ok. Right. Also some of you- ((TB sees SB2's hand raised))  
ya?
- SB2 what's the- what's the meaning of this? Do we have to write 'S' or 'F'? ((SB2 is unable to decipher what TB has written at the end of her work. Having just arrived from India, she is unfamiliar with symbols and abbreviations trs in Singapore use for comments))
- 25 T sorry?
- SB2 you have written..? ((st points at TB's comment in her exercise bk. TB looks at the bk))
- 30 T 'F'. 'F' for 'Fair'. 'Fair good'. Right ((SB2 nods and TB returns to centre-front position))
- S tcher, so no need to write 'see me', huh? ((the st is filling the 'remarks' column in the contents page. As TB has written 'see me' at the end of his work, he wants to know if he has to write this))
- 35 T ya, for 'see me', put 'see me'
- SS ((unint. Sts are comparing answers, and seeking clarification with each other))
- T For those people- if you get a tick in your sentences- in your sentences you get a tick, then it's not necessary for you to do your corrections. Only if you get a cross, ok? Once you get a cross- you have to rewrite-
- SF4 =all huh? ((i.e. the entire 5 sentences))
- 40 T yes. Think of **new** sentences. Ok? For comparison. Right? For comparison.
- T Some of you have very interesting timeline- you have a lot of things included. However- there are some people who only have one event for each five- year gap. Huh. This is generally no effort, huh? Lazy. I am sure in the five-year period there would have been a lot of interesting events that happened to you,
- 45 right?
- SS ((unint. Sts mumble explanations))

- SE4 tcher, the place too small ((SE4 says that they could not write much as there was not enough room on the page))
- T it's up to you to innovate ((unint))
- 50 S tcher I can't remember when we are young ((st was too young))
- T I'm not expecting you to remember every single thing. I did say I'm not expecting you to remember every single thing. But at least there are some special event, right?
- Now I just want to say- in other words- when you do your work- what is the rule for your class routines for the key to success?
- 55 S write down the things ((this student volunteers a key to success: sts should write reminders of things they have to do))
- T not like that. When I say the key to success- when I say the key to success ((tr seems to be trying to get sts to think along more general lines))
- 60 SS ((unint))
- T I said **have pride**. Have pride in your work. Right? Do it properly. I give you time to do it. Do it properly. You understand? Don't 'anyhow can', 'never mind-lah', 'one line enough'. ((TB puts herself in sts' shoes, describing how they may be reassuring themselves that it's ok to work in a slipshod manner, that it does not matter, and that a one-lined answer will be good enough))
- 65 Ok? Put an effort.
- T Ok. Right- any questions?
- SS no
- S correction- use the black pen or green pen?
- 70 T yes black- don't use green, ok? You're not supposed to use green.
- S tcher, the Science teacher asked to use green
- T who?
- SS Science
- T ok- Science different department
- 75 S tcher, no need to write the instructions again- just write the sen-
- T ok- you only use black ((tr ignores previous question)) You just write 'Corrections' so I know it's 'Corrections'- right? Ok? If it's wrong- if it's wrong- you do corrections- don't just do the next work, understand? ((sts continue to confirm and clarify with each other))
- 80 Ok?
- S uh teacher, you just write the sentence ((st repeats same question from earlier))
- T yes, yes
- S tcher, for the timeline how to do?
- T ok. For the timeline I think no need to do. I want you to correct the sentences, ok?
- 85 SC6 if wrong how to do? ((i.e. if the sentence is marked wrong, how should corrections be done?))
- T do again. Think of another sentence. Ok? If you- Listen. Once I tick for you- no need to do- **only if it is a cross**.
- 90 SS yeh!/good!
- SE3 tcher, if no tick, if no cross?
- T What you mean- no tick no cross?
- SE3 if nothing? ((TB gave the st's sentence neither a tick nor a cross))
- T let me see your book ((tr checks st's bk and speaks to him privately))
- 95 S if no tick for timeline?
- T no timeline- timeline is different. Ok?
- Ya, timeline no need. It's all there. I want you to correct the sentences. Ok? Yes? ((some sts still seem unclear, and 2 sts approach her and ask questions

100 privately. It appears that they want to know if they should write corrections on  
a new page. Tr directs her answer to their whole class))

T yes. Yes for corrections- if you have the space on the same page- use the same  
page- it's ok. Just write 'Corrections'. Just write 'Corrections'. Every time you  
do corrections please write 'Corrections'. But use black. Ok? Yes? ((attends to  
another private question))

105 Right. Timeline no need, ok? Right. Any other questions? Before we proceed-  
ok- ((SD6 and SF5 take their exercise bks up to TB one after another, to ask if  
they have done corrections correctly. Tr inspects their bks and nods))

Any other questions?

SS no/no

## 14. Extracts illustrating Teacher Instructions in Class D

### Extract D.TI.1 (from Lesson D4)

#### *Instructions for First Diary Entry*

- T Ok, take out your diaries. Leave the first page alone. Turn to the next page.  
Today you must write at least 12 lines. ((tr writes on b/b:  
“ My English Teacher ”))  
Just write whatever I ask- Write whatever you can on this topic. <My English  
5 Teacher> Write all you can write.  
S tcher, about you uh tcher?  
T yes  
S tcher, Miss (TD)? ((st seems to be clarifying her title))  
T ((glares at him as she has informed and corrected the class several times on  
10 her title)) **Madam** (TD).  
You can write what I look like, how strict I am ((sts talk amongst themselves  
as they settle down to work. TD sees this))  
You do not need to write with your mouth ((sts quieten, TD circulates and sts  
organise themselves quickly as she walks around))  
15 SE3 tcher, want to write date? ((SE3 asks if she would like them to write the date  
on the top of the entry))  
T of course. If you want me to spell any word, look at your dictionaries first.  
((some sts are still not sure of her title and I can hear them whisper “Miss  
(TD) or Madam (TD)?” amongst themselves. No one asks her directly))  
20 You can talk about how I speak- whether you can understand me or not. ((TD  
continues to walk around the room, stopping sometimes to read what sts are  
writing. After a few minutes, she realises that sts do not know how to spell her  
name, and writes this on the b/b))  
25 This is how you spell my name. I have been teaching you for one week, and  
you still don’t know. You must write at least 12 lines. ((sts gradually settle  
down to work, referring to their dictionary occasionally. Tr stops to speak  
privately to a st who is writing on a piece of paper, another who is writing in a  
commercially produced diary, and another who is writing in an exercise bk  
that is too large. She tells them all that they will have to get an exercise bk like  
30 the rest of the class))  
T I notice some of you are not writing  
S tcher, no idea  
T every intelligent student must have ideas about what to write. Don’t say you  
don’t have ideas. Why are you not writing?  
35 SB4 tcher, don’t know what to write  
T you can ta- write about my hair, my nose, my eyes etc., but just keep writing.  
SB4 tcher, but we don’t know you ((SB4 has been asking her neighbours questions,  
and here seems to be speaking for the group))  
T then just write “I think so and so”. You don’t know me much yet, so you can  
40 say “I think my English tr likes whatever”. ((the class falls quiet again. TD

continues to walk around, comes to me and says, "now they are scared so they are quiet"))

45

You can write what you want, I am not going to scold you for what you write. Some of you were asking what I am. I am Punjabi ((she write 'Punjabi' on the b/b, and continues to pace the room. She picks up a diary from a st who has completed his entry and takes it to her desk to read))

Those of you who have finished your 12 lines, bring your diaries to me. ((a handful of sts take their diaries to her. The bell goes, and TD tells students that all diaries have to be handed in the following day))



## Extract D.TI.2 (from Lesson D7)

### *Instructions for assignment in workbook*

- T ok, everybody, look at page one. This is your first workbook assignment.  
Write today's date. What is the date today?
- SS 12/12<sup>th</sup>
- SD3 how to write date tcher?
- 5 T oh, he doesn't know how to write date, even after Primary school ((SE3 shows SD3 how he has written the date in his bk))  
Next. You are going to fill up the present tense. Do you know what the present tense is?
- SS yes!
- 10 T something that happened long ago? That has finished?
- SS no!
- T something that happens?
- SS now!
- T now, for example, I'm going to do the first one for you.
- 15 Usha is showing some photographs of her new classmates and talking about them. So she is looking at the photographs- so is the tense going to be something that is present or something that is over?  
Is it something that is over?  
If you look- if you look at this picture in your book and you're talking about it
- 20 to me. Are you looking at it and talking right now?  
If I ask you to look and talk, are you talking right at the moment?
- SS no/yes
- T yes! Correct? So what kind of tense will that be?
- SS present
- 25 T the family of present tense. But if I ask you to look at it today, the tomorrow, I ask you to tell me all about that picture?
- S past (only one voice)
- T ok, lets look at the first blank. This? What?
- SS is!
- 30 T my new classmate. Her name?
- SS is
- T so, you're going to fill up is or?
- SS are
- T are, for the rest, up til number 8 ((sts are starting to fill in answers)) don't do
- 35 now. Do you know what to do?
- SS yes
- T number one is this? Is. You either write is or are. so <This is my new classmate. Her name> is Lily or are Lily?
- SS is
- 40 T ok, turn over.  
Just now, you talked to your friend, you asked your friend for your likes and dislikes. Mostly you asked for likes, right?
- SS yes
- T ok, for example- Aziz likes going to the beach. So I want you to write four
- 45 sentences of what you dislike to fill up the sentence. Is that clear?

## Extract D.Tl.3 (from Lesson D8)

### *Instructions for contents page, and corrections*

*"I want all corrections to be done properly."*

- T ok this piece of paper that you have ((referring to 'Contents Page'))- I want it to go in front of your workbook. You have a table of contents for every subject, yes?
- SS yes/ya
- 5 T now- the other exercises that you are going to- ((TD sees some sts starting to correct their mistakes)) Don't do corrections yet- listen to **me!** For the first part- everybody take a black pen- number one. Put down the date of- twelve, one, ninety-six .((TD writes this on b/b. This is the date on which students did their last assignment in their workbook))
- 10 There- ((tr spots some sts talking)) **People!** Ok? ((class quietens)) All right- if there are no marks- in this case there are no marks- so put a dash. Put a dash. I didn't give you any marks, right? So put a dash. ((TD walks around, and notices that a st has mistaken the date she has written at the end of his corrected assignment for his marks))
- 15 That's not a mark, that's the date. ((she continues to pace the class, observing if sts have recorded details of the assignment in the Contents Page correctly. Having done this, some sts switch to a green pen for corrections)) Look- all right. I want you to do your corrections using a pencil and not a green pen. I don't want to see your green pens. I'm going to go over the
- 20 answers. Some of you have done it very well. Some of **you:** have used the wrong tense.
- T look at some of your work you have used the past tense instead of the present. The instructions ask you all for present tense. So- so what?
- 25 <This is my new classmate. Her name **is** Lily> Write down- write down in pencil the correct answer. Number two- <She **is** from Hong Kong> Number three- <In this photograph, Lily and I-> <Lily and I> how many persons?
- SS two
- T <**are** at the badminton court>
- 30 SS am
- T so <Many> is or are?
- SS are
- T why is it I cannot say was or were?
- SF5 present tense
- 35 T the question is asking you for?
- SS present tense
- T ok. Is everybody following me?
- SS yes
- T are you doing your corrections?
- 40 SS yes
- T seven. <We?>
- SS are
- T <**are** happy to have new classmates from abroad. It?>
- SS is

45 T <it?>  
T <is interesting to find out more about people from other?>  
SS countries>  
T ok next page, exercise two. Did anybody get exercise two wrong anywhere?  
Did you get a cross?  
50 SS no  
T is there a cross?  
SS no  
T the instructions say write five sentences about the likes and dislikes of people  
in your group. Some of you wrote down my likes or my dislike. I accepted it.  
55 But it should have been your what?  
SS friend's  
T friend's and not I. I is you. Not your- your friends'. Ok exercise 3.  
<Read the following sentences about 2 interesting people. Then fill n the  
blanks. Peipei is just a- coward. She?> what does Peipei do? She?  
60 SS screams  
T <she screams> with [s] or without?  
SS [s]  
T <she screams when she sees?>  
SS sees  
65 T <even a tiny spider?>  
SS makes  
T makes. Why not make? Why you say it is make?  
S because  
T because one spider. One spider you put an [s]. <Peipei?>  
70 SS does  
T <Peipei does. Before she goes to bed> With [s] or without?  
SS [s]  
T <so I often wonder why Peipei frightens> next <Billy is tall and well-built but  
he?>  
75 SS does  
T <when it?>  
SS rains  
T <rains. He?>  
SS watch  
80 T he? How do you spell watches?  
SS [w-a-t-c-h-e-s]  
T do you know why you went wrong?  
SS yes/ya  
S we did not put [e]  
85 T you put-  
SS watch  
T yes. Watch.((she writes on the b/b)) watches. He even? He even?  
S tries  
T many of you spelt it this way- what's wrong?  
90 SS [e-s]  
T when you spell tries, what's wrong? When you have the [y] and you-you want  
it to be in the plural- uh- form- it should be?  
SD3 [i-e-s]  
T <he? hates>  
95 SS hates  
T <in case he?> how do you spell misses?  
SS [m-i-s-s-e-s]

T <he also?>  
 SS likes  
 100 T <his shadow always?>  
 SS wins  
 T how do you spell it?  
 SS [w-i-n-s]  
 T ok. I'm not going to collect any book where there's no corrections done.  
 105 ((SB4 and SC4 take their workbooks to TD, possibly to ask about corrections  
 for a listening comprehension exercise sts did earlier. Tr directs her answer to  
 the class))  
 You did listening compre a few days before you did this exercise right?  
 SS yes  
 110 T now what did I say to you? How to do corrections?  
 SS pencil/use pencil  
 T then? Listening compre- look at the listening compre. I said- I went over the  
 answers and I said to you if you get it wrong, you must what?  
 SS circle  
 115 T a number of you did not listen to me. I have to circle for you because you  
 didn't circle it. In future I'm not doing that. Ok? I want all corrections to be  
 done properly. Ok, now- close all your books. ((sts close their bks))

## Extract D.Tl.4 (from Lesson D14)

### *Instructions for Book Review*

- T this is the 'Contents Page' for your file. Your Reading file. So, I'm going to give you the first piece of paper that has to go into the file. If you have finished reading ((i.e. a book, over the past few weeks)) you write down the title, the author ((on the Contents Page)) Is that clear?
- 5 SS yes
- T some of you- if you have finished, you are supposed to do this book review. ((TD distributes to each st two different review worksheets. Apart from asking for basic information such as title, author etc. of bk, these reviews also require sts to write about plot or character etc.))
- 10 In your review, I can see whether you have cheated or not. Is that clear?
- SS yes
- T how many of you have not finished reading? Be honest and put up your hand. ((two-thirds of class put their hands up))
- 15 Read one book first. ((i.e. TD does not want sts reading another bk until they complete the first one))
- Read any one book first. You have to finish one book. Even if you have to force yourself, go home and read. You have to finish one book.
- T ok, here are the instructions. Everyone listen. By tomorrow, everybody must have a file. This sheet ((holding up first review sheet for all to see)) will be your first page. If you have finished reading your first book- which you should by this Friday- write the title down, the author's name, and submit this to me- =tcher, the other one-?
- 20 S
- T =you can colour as well ((still referring to first sheet, TD ignores st's question)). This one ((lifting second sheet)) is written <Main Character>
- 25 Don't worry about one main character. You can write- you can choose as many characters as possible- in the book- describe them- ok, you can tell me something about them- whether you like them on the whole- something about their behaviour. Is that clear?
- SS yes ((sts are attentive))
- 30 T when you finish it, you can hand this to me **first** before you file it. Is that clear? I am going to mark, and I will know whether you have read the book or not. And when I'm not sure I will call you up to ask you about your book. Ok?
- SS ok

Later in the lesson:

- T      how to do the book review? Tell me what you are doing.  
SB5    ((unint))  
T      You don't know what to do?  
SB5    ((shakes his head))
- 5      T      ok, everyone look up. Pay attention. I want to tell you how to do your review.  
Listen- even those who are still reading. Who is the main character in your  
book? ((TD directs question at SB5 who is still standing by her desk))  
SB5    Pip Parker  
T      ok, Pip Parker. So you will put there Pip Parker ((TD points at blank space in  
10      the review))  
And then tell me something about him. Discuss his character and tell me  
whether you like him or not. If the circle is not enough ((i.e. the circle in the  
review)) you use two circles.  
Now is there only Pip Parker in the story? Anyone else?
- 15      SB5    yes  
T      yes, so you write the next person's name. If there is a dog, put there 'dog' and  
describe the dog. Do you understand now? Do you understand now? ((asking  
SB5))  
SB5    nods and returns to his seat. ((this is a very quiet st, and given his nature, it  
20      does appear a brave gesture on his part to approach TD for help))





## Appendix J: Strategies and Routines

In Lesson B3, TB distributes to her students two handouts, one entitled **‘Strategies for Success’** and the other on **‘Class Routines’**. In LB5, TB discusses the handout in detail. They are reproduced below:

### **‘Strategies for Success’**

1. Constant work
  2. Seek help if you are not sure of anything
  3. Be organised
  4. Dog determination: If at first you don’t succeed, try again
- 

### **‘Class Routines’**

1. Write the title, date and topic for every piece of work
2. Have pride in your work
3. Submit homework on time
4. Do corrections before you submit new work
5. Record all assignments on the contents page



## Appendix K: Student Questionnaire

*This questionnaire will tell me more about you and help me in my study. Please answer all the questions honestly, and as carefully as you can. If you are not sure of anything at all, don't be shy to ask me and I shall help you. I look forward to reading everything you write.*

### 1. Personal Particulars

- 1.1 Name \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.2 Male/Female \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.3 Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.4 Nationality \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.5 Religion \_\_\_\_\_

### About Your Parents:

- 1.6 When did your father stop school? \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.7 When did your mother stop school? \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.8 Father's occupation \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.9 Mother's occupation \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Home Life

- 2.1 How many people do you live with? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2.2 Who are they? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2.3 What language(s) do you speak at home with your:  
parents? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2.31 brothers and sisters? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2.32 grandparents? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2.33 guardian? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2.34 friends in your neighbourhood? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2.4 Which is the language you prefer to use at home? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2.5 Is this the first language you used as a child? [Yes / No]
- 2.51 If you have just answered 'No', which language did you first speak as a child?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2.6 If at home you seldom or almost never speak English, please tick here [ ☐ ]
- 2.7 Do you watch television at home? [Yes / No]
- 2.71 If your answer is 'Yes', about how many hours of TV do you watch per day?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2.72 The programmes you watch are mostly in (Please tick):  
Malay [ ☐ ]  
Mandarin [ ☐ ]  
Cantonese [ ☐ ]  
Hindi [ ☐ ]

- Tamil [     ]  
 English [     ]
- 2.8 Does your home get a copy of the newspapers everyday? [Yes / No]  
 2.81 If your answer is 'Yes', which newspaper(s) do you get?

- 
- 2.82 Do you read the newspaper? [Yes / No]  
 2.83 If your answer is 'Yes', how often do you read it? (Please tick):
- |                    |         |
|--------------------|---------|
| Every day          | [     ] |
| Almost every day   | [     ] |
| 3 - 4 times a week | [     ] |
| Once a week        | [     ] |
| Not at all         | [     ] |

- 2.84 Explain why you do or do not read the newspapers

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### 3. Your School

- 3.1 Was School-X on your list of 6 schools that you chose at the end of Primary 6? [Yes / No]  
 3.11 If yes, which number was it on your list? \_\_\_\_\_  
 3.12 Who chose to put School-X on the list?

- 3.13 Why was School-X chosen?

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- 3.2 Do you remember the day you found out that you were going to be in School-X? [Yes / No]  
 3.21 What were your first thoughts and feelings? Explain your answer:

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- 3.3 Do you remember the day you found out that you were going to be in the Express stream? [Yes / No]  
 3.31 What were your first thoughts and feelings? Explain your answer:

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- 3.4 Now that you've been in your class for more than a month, have your thoughts and feelings about being in the Express class changed? [Yes / No]  
 3.41 If 'Yes', what do you think and feel now?

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- 3.5 How do you feel about being in 1B, with all your classmates?

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- 3.6 What language(s) do you use when speaking with friends in school, outside class?

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- 3.7 What language(s) would you *prefer* to use when speaking with your friends, in school, outside class?

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#### 4. Learning English

- 4.1 You have to learn English in school - you have *no* choice. But do you *want* to learn English? (If you had the choice, would you want to learn English?) [Yes / No]  
 4.11 Why or Why not?

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#### 5. English Lessons

- 5.1 What do you think about your English lessons with (TB)?

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- 5.2 Do the lessons move at the right speed for you? [Yes / No]  
 5.21 If your answer is 'No' explain what you think.

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- 5.3 Do you wish the lessons were different in any way? [Yes / No]  
 5.31 If your answer is 'Yes', explain in what way you would want the lessons to be different:

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- 5.4 Read the following list of English language activities.  
 Number the 3 you enjoy doing with 1, 2 and 3 (1 is what you like the most, 2 is what you like the second most and 3 is what you like third most).  
 Number 12,13,14 those activities that you do not like to do. (14 is what you dislike the most, 13 is what you dislike the second most, and 15 is what you most dislike)

Reading a story book in class	[	]
Doing a book review	[	]
Reading aloud in class, one by one	[	]
Writing a composition in class	[	]
Writing a composition at home	[	]
Doing listening comprehension	[	]
Doing written comprehension	[	]
Doing grammar exercises orally	[	]
Doing grammar exercises		
individually in an exercise book	[	]
Doing exercises with the teacher		
while using overhead transparencies	[	]

- Doing an English project alone [     ]  
 Doing an English project in a group  
     or with a classmate [     ]  
 Writing your English diary [     ]  
 Giving a short speech to your classmates [     ]

## 6. Classroom Behaviour During English Lessons

- 6.1 You have to speak English all the time during English lessons. What do you think about this rule?

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- 6.2 Do you always use English during English lessons? [Yes / No]

6.21 Why?

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- 6.3 Should your teacher do something if a student often breaks this rule by speaking another language? [Yes / No]

6.31 Explain your answer.

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- 6.32 If you think that the teacher should act, what do you think she should do?

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6.33 Why?

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- 6.4 When you don't understand (TB)'s explanation, or when you are not sure about what she has just asked you to do, or when there's a word you don't know the meaning of, what do you do?

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- 6.5 When you are given homework, you do it: [always / sometimes / never]

6.51 Why?

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- 6.6 Does (TB) give you [enough /too little /too much] homework?

## 7. Your English Teacher

List the things you like and don't like about (TB) as a teacher.

7.1 I like...

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9.2 I don't like...

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*The End*





## Appendix L: Summary of Questionnaire Data

### A comment on Truth-value of data:

In my analysis, the data gathered is treated as having a truth-value. It is my intention to outline the students' life worlds - and if they themselves believe their response to be true, or if they want their response to be taken as true, then it is relevant in the sense that it is part of their life world - and therefore part of what I am interested in describing. Responses will be taken to have a truth-value in a world of relative truths.

### A comment on data presentation:

Categories were created during analysis as familiarity with data increased. These categories were gradually reduced to a smaller number (individual categories were combined or collapsed) so as to make reporting and reading the report less cumbersome tasks. The data has however been treated such that as far as possible, it has kept its richness

It is presented, in summary form, in sections that correspond to sections in the original questionnaire (see Appendix K:399)

All questions are preceded by a 'B' or 'D'. When a question number is preceded by 'B', it indicates that the response being presented is that of the Class B. Class B responses are presented first, followed by those of Class D. Some student responses are presented – particularly when they aptly describe attitudes and opinions.

## 1. Personal Details, & Parents' Academic Backgrounds

### Class B (Q1.1-Q1.5)

This class is made up of 33 students, 21 boys and 12 girls. All but one student (a boy who was absent from class on both the days that the questionnaire was administered) completed the questionnaire.

The youngest is a Singaporean aged 11+ and the eldest is a Thai aged 14+, with 84.4% of the class aged, as expected for the level / grade (Secondary 1), 12+.

Ethnically, the class breaks down into

Chinese = 18 (56.3%)

Malay = 11 (34.4%)

Indian = 3 (9.4%)

In terms of nationality, the class is mainly Singaporean (26 students, 81.3%), with 2 Malaysians, 2 Indonesians, 1 Indian and 1 Thai.

In terms of religion, the class is made up of 13 (or 40.6%) Buddhists, 11 (or 34.4%) Muslims, 3 (or 9.4%) Hindus and 2 (or 6.3%) Christians.

#### **Class D (Q1.1-1.5)**

This class is made up of 31 students, 19 boys and 12 girls. All but one student (a girl who was absent from class on both days that the questionnaire was administered) completed the questionnaire.

The majority of the class - 22 (73.3%) is aged, as expected for the level of Secondary 1, 12+.

6 students were 13+ and 2 were 14+.

Ethnically, the class breaks down into

Chinese = 3 (10.0%)

Malay = 25 (83.3%)

Indian = 2 (6.7%)

In terms of nationality, the class is mainly Singaporean – (29 students, 96.7%), with 1 student from Hong Kong.

In terms of religion, the class is made up of 25 (83.3%) Muslims, 2 (6.7%) Buddhists, 2 (6.7%)

#### **B1.6 Father's Educational Attainment**

2 students said that they did not know how much education their fathers had.

6 fathers have primary education, and of these, all have upper primary (i.e. more than primary 3). 18

fathers have secondary education, again with almost all (16) acquiring upper secondary education.

The remaining 2 stopped at secondary 1. 4 have university degrees.

#### **D1.6 Father's Educational Attainment**

1 had received no education, 10 had primary education - with 7 studying till primary 6, and two others stopping at upper primary.

13 had secondary education, with only 5 receiving full secondary education till secondary 4, and 5 stopping in secondary one or two, ie at lower secondary.

So fewer fathers of Class B had secondary education than those of Class B and, from these, more stopped at lower secondary.

Unlike the 4 of Class B, 3 fathers had university degrees.

#### **B1.7 Mother's Educational Attainment**

Again 2 students said that they did not know how much education their mothers had.

2 others had mothers who had received no formal education.

5 had primary education - with 4 stopping at primary 6 and the 5th studied till primary 5.

17 had secondary education, all but 2 of whom studied till secondary 4.

2 received pre-university education and 4 obtained degrees.

### D1.7 Mother's Educational Attainment

Unlike the '2' in secondary 1B, 5 students had mothers who had had no formal education.

11 had primary education - w2 stopped at primary 2, 2 at primary 4, one at primary 5 and the other 6 stopped at primary 6.

Unlike the '17' mothers of secondary 1B, 9 had secondary education, with 6 stopping at secondary 4, and one each at secondary 1, 2, and 3.

Just the same as Class B, 2 received pre-university education. While 2 obtained polytechnic diplomas, none had degrees.

There appears to be quite a marked difference in mother's education between the 2 classes. This is not the case when comparing the educational attainment of fathers.

The mothers of students in Class B have had more formal education than those of Class D. Both Class B and Class D students have been in school for the same number of years, but as far as performance is concerned, the students of Class B can be said to be following their mother's (and parents') footsteps - in doing better in school than the students of Class D.

### B1.8 Father's Occupation

When asked for their father's occupation, the range of response was wide, encompassing a wide range of socio-economic strata - manager, businessman, chauffeur goldsmith, labourer, taxi-driver, etc.

### D1.8 Father's Occupation

When asked for their father's occupation, the responses were as far ranging as those of Class B, covering accountant, engineer, businessman, to stall-vendor and taxi-driver.

### B1.9 Mother's Occupation

A similar wide range was revealed in answer to this question. Answers included businesswoman, dental nurse, secretary, and cleaner. 15 (or 50%) - unlike 59.4% for Secondary 1B were housewives.

### D1.9 Mother's Occupation

A similar range was revealed here - occupations included teacher, tutor, baby-sitter, stall-vendor, etc. 19 mothers (or 59.4%) were housewives.

## **2. Linguistic Background and Home Languages**

### B2.3 First Language

Of the 18 Chinese students in Class B, 13 listed Chinese as their first language (Mandarin = 12, Cantonese = 1). Of the 11 Malay students, 9 said that Malay was their first language, and of the 3

Indians, 2 said that an Indian language was their first language. There were in all 8 different languages represented amongst the 32 students.

Interestingly, the 5 respondents not accounted for above (the 2 Chinese, 2 Malay and 1 Indian) said that English was the language they first learnt to speak.

(This would have been far less likely one generation earlier and demonstrates the linguistic shift that is taking place in a country that is embracing English, using it as a powerful tool as it strives to develop its economy.)

#### D2.3 First Language

Of the 25 Malay students in Class B, 24 listed Malay as their first language. Of the 3 Chinese students, 1 said Cantonese and 2 said Mandarin, and of the 2 Indians, both listed Tamil as their first language.

So 5 languages in total are represented in this class.

Unlike the 5 respondents in Class B who said that English was the first language they learnt to use, only 1 respondent (the Malay unaccounted for) said that English was the language he first learnt to speak.

#### B2.4 Languages used with parents

3 most frequently listed languages listed were

Malay (= 24)

English (=11)

Mandarin (=3).

It is again interesting to note that whilst only one respondents listed English as his first language, 11 say that they use it when speaking with their parents.

#### D2.4 Language used with parents

When asked for the languages used most often with parents, the 3 languages listed most frequently were:

Mandarin (= 15)

Malay (= 10)

English (=10).

#### B2.5 Preferred home language

When asked for the language they preferred to use at home, i.e. the language they would feel most comfortable using at home, 12 said Mandarin, 7 said Malay and 10 said English. The last figure is interesting especially when we keep in mind that only 5 respondents considered English their first language. The other 5 who say that they would prefer to use English show the willingness among Singaporeans to speak English.

#### D2.5 Preferred home language

When asked for the language they preferred to use at home, 24 said Malay, 4 said English, (unlike the 10 of Class B), and 1 said Mandarin.

It is interesting that these respondents are loyal to their ethnic language, and use this language as much as their parents do. There is therefore little linguistic shift, away from an ethnic language to the language of modernity and progress - i.e. English. This is more unusual than it is usual. Could this be why these respondents have not done well and are not doing well in the education system - because they have not exchanged their language for the language associated with educational and economic success?

#### BQ2.8 Availability of daily newspapers at home

When asked about the availability of newspapers (of any medium) at home, 6 of the 32 respondents said that their homes do not get a copy on a daily basis.

#### D2.8 Availability of daily newspapers at home

When asked about the availability of newspapers at home, 9 of the 30 respondents said that their homes do not get a copy everyday. This is 30% of the class, a significantly higher number than that for Class B which is 18.8%. This suggests that both sets of students come from homes which are fairly different in terms of what is available to the student, not just in amount of English input, but also in terms of the quantity or simple availability of literature.

#### B2.82 Do respondents read newspapers?

29 of the 32 students said that they read or referred to the newspaper.

Of these 29, 7 said that they read or referred to it everyday,

10 almost every day,

5 said 3-4 times a week and

7 said once a week.

#### D2.82 Do respondents read newspapers?

28 out of 30 students said that they read or refer to the newspaper.

8 of these 28 said that they read or referred to it everyday,

5 almost every day,

8 said 3-4 times a week and

7 said once a week.

These figures are about the same as they are for Class B, showing that although the two classes have homes that vary in terms of availability of newspapers, both groups of students do have about the same amount of weekly exposure, in terms of frequency, to newspapers.

#### B2.84 Why?

When asked why they read or refer to the papers, the answer most frequently (15 respondents) given was 'for information' - about events in the world, sports news, and television programmes.

7 respondents read the papers to improve their language. Of these 4 read the English newspapers, 2 the Malay, and 1 the Mandarin daily

#### D2.84 Why?

When asked why they read or referred to the papers, the answer offered most frequently (14 respondents) was the same as that gathered in Class B, i.e. 'for information' - about events in the world, sports news, and television programmes.

5 respondents read the papers to improve their English. Unlike Class B, no student said that they read the newspapers to improve either Malay or Mandarin.

### **3. Getting to the School and the Stream**

#### **Getting to the school**

##### B3.10 Was the school on the list of 6 schools that were listed at the end of primary 6?

Only 12 of the 32 students of Class B had included this school in their list of 6 schools they would like to attend. This means that 20 students of Class B ended up being posted to School-X without having included this school amongst their choice of 6. (is this typical - ie. is it common for 20 of 32 students to not be posted to a school on their list? And if it not, then what does it say of

- a) the student's performance in the national examinations the year before,
- b) the standards of the school in terms of the students who are posted to it?)

##### D3.10 Was the school on the list of 6 schools that were listed at the end of primary 6?

Unlike the 12 of Class B (37.5%), 27 students of Class D (90%) had included School-X as 1 of their 6 choices.

This marked difference suggests that both groups of students perceive the same school differently, or that they might perceive the school the same way, but have different educational aspirations. Class B students/parents see the school as less desirable than Class D parents/ students, and correspondingly, a far fewer number of Class B respondents want to be students of School-X.

##### B3.11 Number on the list

Of the 12 who had listed this school as one of their choice of 6, one did not go on to provide a response to this question. Of the 11 who did, it is interesting to note that only 1 had listed School-X as his first choice, and 2 others had it listed as their second choice.



All the remaining 8 respondents placed School-X as their 4th, 5th or 6th choice. This suggests that School-X is not a school ranked highly, at least not in the eyes of these students.

#### D3.11 Number on the list

Of the 27 who had included this school amongst their choice of 6, as many as 13 had it listed as their first choice, with 10 others listing it as choice 2 or 3.

Only 3 respondents had ranked the school as their 4th or 5th choices, and not one respondent had it listed as choice 6.

This again is in rather strong contrast to what was found amongst Class B respondents.

Most of the Class D respondents located the school within their top 3 choices, whereas most of the Class B respondents placed it as amongst the bottom 3. This lends support to what was suggested above when looking at the response to Q3.10, that School-X is perceived differently by the 2 classes.

#### B3.12 Who chose to put school on the list?

Of the 12 who had chosen the school, only 1 had made the choice himself - and it is the very same student who had listed School-X as his number one choice. For 8 of the other respondents, it was their parent or parents who had chosen to include School-X as one amongst the 6 schools.

#### D3.12 Who chose to put school on the list?

Of the 27 who had chosen the school, 10, (unlike the 1 of Class B) had made the choice themselves.

Here again is information that contrasts with that of Class B. What is significant is that as 12 year olds, these respondents appear to have been entrusted with the task of selecting where they would be receiving the next 4 to 5 years of their education. They seem to be in-charge of or responsible for their education to a greater extent than the respondents of Class B.

What we do not know is that they perhaps had no choice because they may come from families which place less of a premium on good education than do most (or the average) Singaporean families, and so their parents don't feel the need to be in control of their child's education, as they may not see this as an important part of parenting.

This is somewhat unusual in Singapore, which as a newly developed country, sees education as a highly successful leveller; it is the new religion which delivers to those who believe and invest in it. It is a religion which rewards or delivers here and now, in this life.

If what these Class D respondents say is indeed true, then in their homes education is seen differently from how it is seen in a more typical Singaporean home where parents closely monitor their child's education.

#### B3.13 Why was school chosen?

The reason most frequently offered was 'proximity' to the respondent's home, and the corresponding convenience of transport. 9 of the 12 respondents said this.

#### D3.13 Why was school chosen?

As for Class B respondents, the most common reason put forward as to why the school was chosen was because of its proximity to the respondent's home and because of the ease with which one could get transportation to the school. 16 of the 27 respondents said this.

From the other responses 3 stood out as they were unexpected. 2 respondents said that they had put School-X on their list simply because they did not know better.

One seemed to know very well - not just about the school, but also about how not many students would include School-X on their list. This being the case, it would be relatively easy to get into School-X because there would be fewer students competing for the school. This student chose School-X, and put it number one on his list as a strategic move, to guarantee getting the school he wanted.

And finally one respondent, a female who was observed to be a conscientious student, eager to learn, said that:

- 'It is because the School-X have sikit Muslim.'

(Translated, this reads, 'because the school has less /fewer Muslim students'. This is why she chose to come to School-X. )

This is more revealing as she is herself a Malay and a Muslim. However, she sees a school with fewer Muslims as one which is more attractive.

#### **Attitude to the school**

##### B3.21 What were first thoughts and feelings?

20 respondents said that they felt negatively when they first found out that they had been posted to School-X. This is not surprising as it was also 20 students who had not asked to come to School-X in the first place.

However, their answers reveal that their sense of disappointment was indeed strongly felt. One said that she was 'sad and disappointed', another was 'very sad and unhappy because the classmates (primary 6 classmates) said that it was a lousy school'; and a male student 'almost broke out in tears'.

The respondents explained their reaction by saying that School-X is a 'bad school', with not very good school facilities; it is 'a Malay school' with a lot of gangsters; and the teachers and reputation of the school are 'not very good'.

Of the 7 who felt positive, their answers seem more a reaction to passing their PSLE exams, making it to a secondary school, being able to make new friends, etc than a reaction to the school itself.

### D3.21 What were first thoughts and feelings?

6 respondents said that they felt negatively when they first found out that they had been posted to School-X.

Interestingly, these were more because of the school's location, etc., not because of the reputation of the school. Only one student made a negative reference to School-X when she said that she was sad, 'not proud' of herself, and regretted not having been more prepared for the PSLE exams.

17 students were happy when they found out that they would be studying at School-X. Their responses seem to be more an expression of relief at having made it through the Primary 6 exams, and less to do with having made it to School-X in particular.

### B3.31 What were first thoughts and feelings?

All but 2 of the respondents said that they were happy to have made it to the express stream. The range of responses explain their reaction clearly:

They were 'very happy' to fulfill their 'dream' of getting into the express stream; proud that they are 'better than the normal'. There was also relief because parents wished them to be in this stream, and had he not made it, a male respondent said that 'it would be a shame on my family'.

But making it to the top stream does not come without the pressure to perform - 2 students were anxious about being able to cope with their studies, worried that they might not be able to keep up with the class.

### D3.31 What were first thoughts and feelings?

Answers to this question add up to more than 30 because 3 responses have been broken down into 2 responses each, making a total of 33.

8 students said that they were happy - but happy to have passed the PSLE exam, to have secured a place in a secondary school, etc. Their responses show that they have misread the question, because they have not addressed their thoughts and feelings about being in a Normal Technical class.

4 other students wrote answers which did not address the question at all and I could not understand what they were responding to. Unable to categorise their responses, they were therefore discounted.

Only 3 students make specific reference to being in this stream, and say that they are happy to be in Class D.

Happy because they get to go for technical classes, happy because they need to buy less textbooks, and relieved to not be in another stream which would be too difficult to cope with.

All other responses were negative, with 11 respondents saying they felt sad and ashamed to be in Normal Technical. Responses were strongly phrased, with one student saying that he feels 'very

ashame that I am the Normal Technical person. Another wrote that she wishes very much that she is in the Normal Academic stream because 'it have more work'.

One wrote of his fear when breaking the news to his parents, saying that he feels 'scare because my father will canned me. When I went home my father said congratulations.' His father's reaction is revealing, and seems to suggest that he does not have very high expectations for his son, and so congratulates him on making it into the stream to which students who perform the most poorly in the PSLE exam are sent.

Another interesting response comes from a Chinese girl:

- 'My first thoughts is frighten and my feelings are nervous. This is because my class all Malays and I am the only Chinese girl. The NT is noisy and the maths teacher teach very slow.'

Her response displays an awareness of her ethnicity and that of those around her. She is not comfortable in this 'noisy' class, or with the slow-teaching maths teacher.

For this student it must not be very easy to come to class everyday.

What both sets of students capture in their responses is a wide range of student perceptions of 'express' and 'normal technical' streams, as well as the feelings and status attached to being part of each.

Apart from the 3 students of Class D who say that they are happy to be in 'normal technical', getting into the express stream seems to be a goal shared by most students. This is interesting as it reveals that despite about 15 years of this system of streaming where the 'normal technical' and 'normal academic' streams have been presented by the Ministry of Education as the norm (and so the terms '*normal academic*' and '*normal technical*'), it is still perceived as negative and undesirable to not make it to the express stream. And so it is natural that Class D students feel sad and a sense of shame amongst friends, family and relatives.

#### B3.40 Have these changed over this first month?

18 students of Class B said that their thoughts and feelings had changed over the first month they had spent at School-X.

#### D3.40 Have these changed over this first month?

Most of the students (27) said that these had changed over the time they had spent at School-X.

#### B3.41 What do you think and feel now?

Generally, of the 18 respondents above, 16 said that they felt that they had made positive adjustments socially as well as academically. They had made friends whom they felt cared for them, and they were relieved that they were coping with the pace of learning.

D3.41 What do you think and feel now?

Although 27 respondents said yes above, there were 29 answers to this question, revealing an inconsistency in how respondents answered.

3 said that they had made positive adjustments to the stream, and were generally feeling better about being in Normal Technical.

4 other students showed that they were still feeling negatively about being in the Normal technical class, and want to work hard so that they could upgrade themselves to one of the other streams.

12 students wrote that they were happy with their classmates.

7 students however had negative comments to make about their classmates referring to them as bullies and gangsters, with one worrying that she had changed as now 'I am naughty because of the class is very noisy and they also have no respect for the teacher. And I hope I can change from today. And I really going to change'.

Both groups of students seem to have undergone a similar change of feelings - with Class B students coming to terms with being a student of School-X and Class D students generally feeling more positively about being in the Normal Technical stream.

Perhaps this reveals the strength of the human spirit and its flexibility to adjust personal standards and expectations so that they align themselves more with reality, and consequently, make reality easier and perhaps less painful to cope with.

Having said this, 4 students of Class D still feel negatively about being in this stream, and want to upgrade. One wonders how long it will take them to give up this desire, and to simply accept their stream.

It seems also that for Class D students, getting along with classmates is important and in total 19 (12 = 7) students refer to social adjustment within the class. This may mean that getting along or failing to get along with their classmates is an important part of being a student, and is thus mentioned as part of their response to this question, instead of addressing this issue in their response to the next question.

Or perhaps this suggests once again that these respondents have misread the question, or been unable to understand the limits of the question asked.

B3.50 How do you feel about being in your class with your classmates?

Responses to this question outnumber respondents because 3 responses are counted twice as each offered 2 opinions. The total number of responses (opinions) is thus  $32 + 3 = 35$ .

In all, there were 24 positive references to classmates, saying that they are caring, co-operative, helpful etc.

There were however 3 negative comments about classmates. One said that he 'found it difficult to cooperate with them'; another 'felt ashamed of my classmates, especially the Malay girls because of this Valentines' Day, my father says its unIslamic'.

There were however 5 comments which referred specifically to the noise level of the class. One respondent said that '...the boys disturbed us and make our class very noisy. I hope they can stop it and work hard. Usually, girls are the ones who bring up the name of our class.'

D3.50 How do you feel about being in your class with your classmates?

Responses outnumber respondents because 3 responses are counted twice as each offered 2 opinions. Total becomes  $30 + 3 = 33$ .

A significant chunk of these were 20 positive comments made about classmates, showing that the students generally found their classmates fun and kind, even if 'they are not so smart like other students...'.

One felt reassurance in numbers, saying that, 'with all my classmates. I don't feel very very a shame because not only me who the normal technical'.

From the rest, 11 comments referred to a general state of unhappiness with classmates. 2 respondents did not address the question when they wrote of being unhappy in this stream. Their responses are nevertheless revealing as they respond to Q3.31. One say that he is no longer the happy student he was before when his relative 'look me normal..' because now they 'look me down.'

The rest of these 11 (ie.9), were about being unhappy with the behaviour of classmates. There were several comments made about a particular student who was referred to as 'a big bully' who 'always like to scold some of the girls bad word and very rule (rude) thing'.

3 other respondents spoke disapprovingly of the behaviour of classmates during lessons, even as early as the first day of school: 'First day of school, I can see that there are many of them are talkative.'

Looking at the responses of both classes, both sets of students seem to have adjusted well to their classmates, getting along more than not getting along with each other.

There are however, in total 8 (5 +3) complaints made by Class B students and 15 (11 +3 + 1) complaints made by Class D students. Of these, both groups complain about the noise in the class. It would seem that these respondents believe that there should not be too much noise in the class, and that learning should happen in a relatively quiet environment. Although not universal, this kind of learning environment which is quiet is quite the norm in the Singaporean classroom.

## 4. Learning English and English Lessons

### B4.10 Would respondent chose to learn English, given the choice?

All but one of the respondents of Class B replied yes to this question.

### D4.10 Would respondent chose to learn English, given the choice?

Just as in Class B, all but one respondent would choose to learn English.

### B4.11 Why yes? / Why no?

Some respondents offered more than one reason as to why they would want to learn English if given the choice. The total number of responses is 44. (The average could be worked out to  $44/31 = 1.42$ )

Clearly, respondents are aware of the importance of English in Singapore and around the world. And this importance is emphasised in school as well. 17 students said this. A language is important usually because of what can be done with it.

And it is to these more specific uses of English that all other responses refer to. Seen in this way, they are elaborations of the above 17 responses. Respondents said that English is important or necessary for 'present/future educational advancement' (7); 'for future employment' (6); and for 'cross-cultural communication' with Singaporeans as well as foreigners.

Other more general responses were that 'English is important for the future' (4); and that it 'is the means to greater knowledge' (2).

One respondent said that he would not, if given the choice, want to learn English 'because if there is no English education, there will be no English homeworks. So we will have more free time'. He is an Indonesian, and this may be significant that the only comment of this kind comes from a non-Singaporean.

### D4.11 Why yes? / Why no?

Why 'Yes'

Because responses are greater than number of respondents as some offer more than one reason and so are counted more than once, the total = 33, and the avarage = 1.14

### B4.2 Opinion on English Lessons

(Students don't restrict their responses to lessons alone - they write about their teacher's personality as well. I had assumed incorrectly that they would be able to separate their opinions on their lessons from those on their teacher - which is what a later question asks)



There are different ways of presenting the data gathered through this question, but as the objective is to summarise the responses of the class by treating it as an entity in itself, I have analysed the data by counting how many comments in total were made of lessons, teaching, personality, and general management of the class because both groups of students respond to this question by referring to these various aspects of a lesson.

It was however sometimes difficult to categorise comments made about lessons, teaching, and personalities as because they depict the reality of interpenetrating worlds, they often overlap, and sometimes the category seems rather arbitrary. However, it was easier to categorise opinions as being positive or negative.

Class B students made a total of 49 comments, the bulk of which (53.1%) were positive comments about their English lessons. Respondents said that the lessons were interesting, exciting, challenging, and that they were able to understand their lessons very well.

They said that 'her way of teaching is just right for me'; with one student saying that she was her 'my favourite teacher. I love having my lessons with her. How I wish she could teach me all the subjects...'.

They saw her as understanding – 'She is great, she doesn't schold if we never do our homework'; and that said 'she is a kind and loving a teacher I have ever seen'. They were thoughtful in their response as can be seen from the following – 'Very happy to have such a caring teacher.' 'Til now I still cannot find (TB) bad point.' 'She always so friendly.' 'She is a fair teacher.'

However not all students had only positive comments to make. What I found more illuminating was the way negative opinions were offered. There were a total of 12, with 4 referring to lessons in general and 8 specifically about the classroom management and noise level.

Two students found the lessons dull and boring, but one respondent surprised me by being openly and strongly negative. He described the lessons as 'rotten and people do anything they want'. I think he means is that the lessons are bad because students do what they want as there is insufficient classroom management. This point is remade by others who say that the lessons are 'always very noisy', and that 'the noise is terrible, the class including me are not paying attention'. Others referred to her directly, saying that 'she couldn't rule the mad guy in our class', and that 'she is not as strict as my (T-Maths). I think she must be fierce with us so that everybody will keep quiet and pay attention to what she wants to teach', and that she 'seldom punish a student when she talk'.

Perhaps I find the students disapproval of the noise level allowed or tolerated by the teacher more significant because as an observer of their lessons, I was myself surprised at how much 'noise' was tolerated - clearly more than I would myself allow as a teacher - despite the fact that as a teacher in a private foreign school, I learnt to be more accustomed to noisier classrooms.

There were occasions as I carried out classroom observations when students tried to silence their classmates - saying that they could not concentrate on their task because the class was far too noisy. And this was as their teacher sat at her desk, or moved from group to group.

#### D4.2 Opinion of English Lessons

In expressing their opinions, Class D students made 39 comments (10 less than Class B). But just as it was for Class B, the majority of these 18 (or 46.2%) were positive comments about their lessons in general.

They find their lessons 'fun', and seem to appreciate the fact that 'she will explain until we understand', and that she is 'a very patient teacher'. They like the fact that 'She is not to angry and not to fast while doing the work,' and that 'she is so kind to me and seldom scold me'.

Their responses reflect a degree of reflective thought as can be seen in comments like 'I think she is a very intelligent English teacher because she helps me now to improved my English.'

What was especially interesting, given opinions expressed by Class B students, is that only 2 negative comments were made - compared to the 10 of Class B.

And these comments were not as strongly worded, and not even very negative in themselves.

One respondent who was often scolded in class, and made to stand during lessons because he had spoken in Malay said, surprisingly, that she didn't scold them (as perhaps she should). This is a little puzzling considering he of all should know that she did. Perhaps she did not scold them as much or punish them as severely as he would expect to be, because of past experiences as a student.

The other negative comment reads 'She like to scold us everyday because of the naughty ones' which is more in agreement with what I had observed.

It is perhaps illuminating that both groups of students whose teachers are not very different from each other in terms of teaching style - except for the level of noise tolerated behave differently when they are asked to be critical of their lessons. Class B students appear to be more comfortable doing this - perhaps because as relatively good students, they may have higher expectations of their teachers, or that they may be more aware of their rights as students to what their teachers should provide them with.

(Are Class B students more critical than Class D students?)

#### B4.3 Right speed?

29 said that they found that the lessons proceed at the right speed, and 3 said they did not.

#### D4.3 Right speed?

As was the case for Class B, 3 respondents said 'no' to this question.

#### B4.31 If no, explain

Of the 3 above, two prefer the lessons to move faster and one finds that ‘...the speed is fast for me. But I try to get used to it.’

#### D4.31 If no, explain

Of the 3 who said ‘no’ above, two said that they would prefer their teacher to go slower, with one of them suggesting, in Malay, that sometimes she could stop (speaking) for a while, and the other explaining that ‘Because I am a slow learner and sometimes (TD) teach I can’t catch up.’

The third response suggests that the student may not have understood the question.

#### B4.4 Should lessons be different?

5 students wanted their lessons altered in some way. 27 others said ‘no’ to this question.

#### D4.4 Should lessons be different?

3 respondents said that they would want their lessons to be different in some way.

#### B4.41 If yes, how?

Responses varied with students saying they want their lessons to move faster, their classmates to be less talkative, to have more group work, etc.

#### D4.41 If yes, how?

These respondents said that they wanted their lessons to be more challenging, so that they would learn more. However, one of these 3 said that he wanted his lessons to ‘slow down because I am very slow.’ I find this response somewhat disturbing as I wonder how is it that this student has learnt so well that he is a ‘slow learner’. He is the same respondent who was quoted in 4.31 above, and this is the second time he is again referring to himself as a slow learner.

#### B4.5 Three most liked language learning activities

The top 3 liked language learning activities were:

Doing an English project in a group or with classmate (22)

Reading a story book in class (13)

Writing your diary (9)

Learning, in these activities, is ‘hidden’ or indirect, ie, it is not the immediately apparent focus of the task, and is more a by-product of a group discussion, or the unravelling of a plot of a story. Perhaps more significant is the fact that all 3 activities are not output or product oriented. Learners are not required to produce a piece of work, to participate actively, and so don’t have to show how they are fairing. These are activities which are not usually graded, perhaps because they are not easy to grade. And knowing this, the learner probably feels under less stress to perform.

Why would learners not want to 'perform'? To show what they are learning, or what they are not learning very well?

One explanation could be that learners are lazy - and prefer to learn passively rather than through a more active involvement. But this is too simplistic. Could it be that they lack confidence, as they may not feel that they are good English learners, and so they shy away from a more performance oriented learning? If this is true, then more confident learners would not display this preference for non-performance based learning activities. Or that being relatively new to each other, and self-conscious teenagers, they would prefer to not display their lack of competence in English to their classmates and teacher. If this is the case, then with time and more familiarity, they would be less shy.

#### D4.5 Three most liked language learning activities

The more liked activities are:

Reading a story book in class (12)

Doing an English project in a group or with classmate (10)

Writing your diary (10)

[Doing a book review (9)]

The responses above are remarkably similar to those of Class B. And suggests that the appeal of language learning activities which are neither output or product oriented nor evaluation oriented is one that is general to both classes of students.

#### B4.6 Three least liked language learning activities:

Most disliked activities are:

Writing a composition in class (15)

Doing an English project alone (14)

Doing exercises with the teacher while using OHT (12)

The responses above are more significant after the comments made in Q4.5 above for these most disliked learning activities are all performance oriented, and during which how a student fares can be easily judged to be right or wrong, evaluated, and ranked amongst the performance of the class. For this reason, all the activities pose a very real threat to the learner, more so if s/he is not a confident learner. There is the very real threat of suffering a loss of face.

[The next most disliked activity = Giving a short speech to your classmates (11). This, because of what it is, seems to be in agreement with the comment just made.)

#### D4.6 Three least liked language learning activities:

The most disliked activities are:

Giving a short speech to your classmates (11)

Doing an English project alone (10)

Doing a book review (6)

[Writing composition in class(6) Doing exercises with teacher while using OHT (6)]

We again see a similarity to the responses by Class B.

This poses the question that if Class D students are not as competent in English as those of Class B then would they not be expected to shy away more from the more direct language learning activities?

If so, how might this be observed?

Another issue is that students have included 'doing exercise with the teacher while using OHT'. This happened only once or twice, and only towards the end of the observation period. What was striking to me as the observer is the enthusiasm with which students participated in this activity. They were eager to do the exercises, and seemed to be enjoying themselves, working as a class, in a free-for-all answer session. It seemed as though they took it as a game, and were motivated to 'win'.

Yet here they say they don't like this activity. Is it because they saw themselves providing the answers to the exercises individually, one at a time, and so felt a face-losing threat.

## 5. Linguistic Behaviour in School and in Class

### Language comfortable with at school

#### B5.1 Language used with friends in school, outside class

With this question I wanted to confirm what had been observed as I watched and spoke to students during 'recess-time'. Little English was used, and when it was, it was often mixed with Malay and Mandarin in the same sentence.

In response to this question, only 5 students said that they were comfortable speaking English, whereas 18 students said that they were comfortable conversing in both Chinese and English, or Malay and English. This is in agreement with what was observed.

#### D5.1 Language used with friends in school, outside class

As it was for Class B, most (20) students list both English and at least one other language, while 4 students said that they were comfortable with using only English. I read their response as them using both languages often in the same sentence, i.e. there is no clear line between the languages. What was also observed was that students generally used English when they were speaking cross-culturally to someone of another ethnic group. In cases where 2 Malay or 2 Chinese students spoke English, it was often observed that the speakers were those same students who spoke better English, and were those who seemed to be more comfortable with the language. Could it be that they were more bilingual than others of perhaps that English was simply their stronger language? (If the latter is true, then do these students do better in English?)

#### B5.2 Preferred language with friends in school, outside class

This question was asked because I wanted to know if respondents were comfortable using the language(s) they did when they spoke outside lessons, and if they did not actually prefer using another language. Their responses surprise me because I did not expect as many as 14 respondents to say that they prefer to be using only English, especially after only 5 said they did this in the question before. Perhaps this is the response they think I would want to see, the 'right' response. With hindsight, I think these responses would be more revealing if I had asked 'why?' as a follow-up question - for then a possible answer might be - 'So that I will be able to improve my English'.

What may be revealing is that of the 18 Chinese students, 5 say that they'd prefer to use only Mandarin, and of the 11 Malays, 4 say they'd prefer to use only Malay.

#### D5.2 Preferred language with friends in school, outside class

More students said they'd prefer to use English only (8), but this number is smaller than it is for Class B (which is 16). As many as 17 students said that they would prefer to use only Malay outside lessons. This is interesting that as many as 17 students out of the total 25 Malays prefer to use Malay.

This poses the question, why do about one third (36.4%) of Class B Malay students prefer to use Malay, and why does this percentage rise to about two thirds (68%) in Class D? Could this difference say something about why these Malay students of Class D are not in Class B? This difference in attitude, or preference towards English adds to what was said in question 2.4 about how students of Class D seem to be more rooted in Malay, and come from less bilingual homes.

### **Speaking English during English**

#### B5.3 Opinion on having to speak English during English lessons

All but 4 respondents said that they thought that it was a good idea to speak only English during English lessons, with 13 respondents saying specifically that this is important as it enables them to improve their English.

There were however 4 respondents who did not agree with having to use only English, with one saying that 'it's because sometimes it's hard to say certain words so we have to say it in our own language.' Another respondent thought it was 'unfair to speak English during the lesson because we as a different race has the right to speak other languages'.

#### D5.3 Opinion on having to speak English during English lessons

Responses to this question were surprisingly similar to those of Class B, with all but 5 students saying that they thought it was a good idea, and with 13 referring specifically to how it would help them improve their English. 5 students however, did not think that this was a good idea, saying that they were 'angry and unhappy', because they 'cannot speak English well', or feel ashamed because they only 'know to speak a few English'.

Their reaction makes one aware of the fact that for these students English is quite an alien language, probably not looked forward to. They must feel uncomfortable with having to do all of their learning

in English, to have to study in an English-medium school. This must make their education difficult indeed.

B5.40 Do you always use English during English?

19 students said 'yes' with the other 13 saying 'no'.

D5.40 Do you always use English during English?

Answers were similar to those of Class B - with 19 students saying that they always use English and 10 others saying they didn't.

B5.41 Why?

Of the 19 who responded 'yes', 10 said they speak English because it is a rule they have to obey so that they would not get their teacher angry, or be punished in any way. After the responses to the earlier questions one would expect more respondents saying that they speak English because they want to improve their language. However, only 4 students say this. Could this mean that their need to not break rules is more important than their need to improve their English by speaking the language?

Of those 13 respondents who said 'no', 5 said they did not do so because they felt that their English is not good enough and 5 others said that it was peer pressure that made them use Malay or Mandarin instead of English. One respondent felt strongly about not speaking English and explained that he hates speaking in English. Could this be simply because he does not feel competent enough with the language?

D5.41 Why?

Of these 19, here again most of the respondents (9) say that they speak English because they want to avoid breaking the rule, and so avoid being punished. 7 others say that they speak English because they want to improve their language.

Of the 10 who responded 'no' to the question before, they don't speak English during English lessons because they have inadequate linguistic competence, and are uncomfortable with speaking the language.

There was one strongly worded response - with the respondent saying that he doesn't like speaking the language because it wastes his time - and after all - there is no real difference whether one speaks in English or Malay. Another respondent said that he loves speaking Malay and does not speak English because after all, the teacher can understand him when he speaks in Malay. This means that the teacher, by showing the student that they can be understood when they speak Malay has given them a very strong reason to not speak English.

**Discipline**

B5.50 Should teacher take action if another language is used instead of English?



Despite the fact that 13 respondents said that they don't always speak English, it was only 8 who went on to say that they do not think that they should be punished for this, with 24 respondents saying that the teacher should take some form of action when students speak another language during English lessons.

D5.50 Should teacher take action if another language is used instead of English

26 respondents thought that the teacher should take action, 4 did not.

B5.51 Explain answer

The respondents who said 'yes' above went on to explain their answer saying firstly that it is important that this lesson rule is adhered to, and secondly, that as teachers, it was their duty to also be the enforcers of this rule.

The majority of the respondents (21) support the need to enforce this rule because of a host of reasons which are illuminating as they show clearly what the Singaporean student perceives to be part of the teacher's set of duties, apart from teaching.

4 students emphasised the right and duty of teachers as rule enforcers, saying that 'she, as the teacher, has the right to do anything to us', and 'if the teacher do not punish the pupil, he would be more daring next time'. Another said that it was 'the teacher's responsibility to take care of her student' (ie by punishing them when need be). What also seems to be suggested is that punishment can be a good thing, from this response: 'If I was wrong I would deserve it because teacher punish us because she/he would like to change our bad attitude.'

Together, these comments suggest that a teacher who does not keep her students in order through punishment if need be is one who is not doing her job.

3 respondents go on to propose actions that the teacher could take - thereby answering Q5.52, writing that the teacher should tell the student to speak only English, or that the student should be sent for detention class, and if the student still goes on to break the rule, he should be taken to the principal. This last suggestion is somewhat severe bearing in mind that in Singapore schools, being sent to the principal is usually seen as rather serious measure.

Of the 8 respondents who said that no action should be taken, there were explanations that ranged in tone from 'Its his/her right to speak any language' and 'it is easier for the Chinese to use Mandarin to communicate' to 'Each person has own race and was difficult to change sometimes', 'Because they are used to it' to a somewhat more defiant 'Because sometimes the teacher speak another language too'. One respondent explained why a student who breaks the rule should be left alone - because, after all, it is he/she who will pay the price when his/her English does not improve.

#### D5.51 Explain answer

Respondents provided a similar wide range of explanations as to why their teacher should take action if and when they don't speak English. The teacher does because English is important in their life, and she wants them to improve their English for their future. And 'if she don't punish them. they will continue to beriks the rule'.

Although not asked for by the question, 2 respondents suggested the offender be sent to detention class. Others said that the teacher should warn the student, scold him/her, make him/her stand outside the class (so that other students will see the offender being punished), send him/her to the head of department), or to just remain standing for the entire lesson. One even proposed a financial penalty - saying that the student could be made to pay a fine for speaking English.

Of the 4 students who said that the teacher should take no action against students who used other languages, the reasoning displayed was similar to those offered by Class B students. Students sometimes don't know how to say what they want to in English: and sometimes they make simple genuine mistakes. Punishment is not fair because not all students who break the rule get punished because sometimes a teacher does not hear some when they don't speak English. One respondent said that he did not think that the teacher should take any action 'Because I hated someone beat me (or) even my friend'. It is interesting that this respondent sees 'taking action' as 'beating'.

#### B5.52 If 'yes' to 5.5, what should teacher do?

The teacher should remind students to use English, scold them, punish them by making them read more story books, fining them - 'Ask the pupils to fund \$1 and at the end of the year donate all the money to charity' - or sending them for detention class. The more popular suggestions were getting the offenders to write lines (5), and taking them to the principal (4).

#### D5.52 If 'yes' to 5.5, what should teacher do?

The milder suggestions were that the teacher should remind offenders not to speak another language, that she should scold them, make them write lines or read more books. Others said that she should be strict, and should punish students by getting them to stand at the door. One said that she should not teach. However, 3 made rather severe suggestions, saying that 'Because she wants to improve our English ...she should punish us. Go for canning at the office', 'She should .. phoned parents and bring to principal'. And finally one recommended that the teacher should 'Take away my bus pass for one week...'.  
(I could not understand four responses - they did not seem to be related to the question - and I have therefore been unable to categorise them.

#### B5.521 Why?

Responses to this question were similar to those to Q5.50, in so far that punishment is justified, and were different to those to Q5.50 in so far that a particular punishment is justified.

For 6 respondents, it was clear that punishment should be administered when a rule is broken. This seems obvious to them when they say '... if you did something wrong, you ought to be punish'.

For another 9 respondents punishment is good and therefore necessary because it alters the student's behaviour - 'So that he would feel more ashamed and would not do it again', and 'this would help them to pay more attention during other (English) lessons.

There was also the explanation as to why it is wrong to speak another language, because - 'It is unfair for others who do not understand that specticular (particular) language'.

#### D5.521 Why?

As they did in Class B, respondents here explained why they thought that a student who speaks another language should be punished, however unlike Class B, there were no explanations as to why a particular punishment should be administered, or would be more effective.

For 3 students the offender should be punished because after all a rule has been broken.

5 say that punishment will help the student change his/her behaviour - 'It will make the pupils not be a playful person and he/she will be a responsible person'.

Others offer simple rationales which justify punishment - saying that it is for their own good and will in the long run, help them improve in their English.

Interestingly, one respondent said that it is an important rule to enforce, because if they don't all speak English, the Chinese students will think that they are being spoken of when their classmates use Malay -

- 'Because wait the Chinese people think we talk about them.'

And for one student, a teacher should take action and punish her students when necessary because 'Went (when) we grow up to be a teacher must be act liked a teacher.' She means to say that when they themselves become teachers, they will have to behave appropriately - as teachers should, and punish students when necessary.

## **6. Homework and the Good Language Learner**

### **Seeking clarification**

#### B6.1 When uncertain of teacher's explanation, instruction or meaning, what do you do?

The majority of the respondents (25) said that they would ask their teacher to clarify or explain what they did not understand. Of these, 4 would go up to the teacher, during or after the lesson to ask for clarification.

For 3 students, it makes no difference if they ask their teacher or their classmates. Only 2 students said that they would ask only their classmates, and 1 said that she would either ask her classmates or keep quiet - 'I will ask my friend or just keep quiet'.

D6.1 When uncertain of teacher's explanation, instruction or meaning, what do you do?

The majority (19) would ask their teacher for a clarification - however, only one compared to the 4 of Class B said that they would go up to the teacher to ask her.

For 2 students it did not matter if they asked their teacher or their classmates - for they would do either. 2 other students said that they would only ask their classmates.

Somewhat surprisingly, 3 students said they would look up a dictionary. None of the Class B students had said this.

1 student said that either he would ask his classmates or he would keep quiet. Another student responded by saying that he would keep quiet if there was something he did not understand. None of the Class B students said this.

## **Homework**

B6.2 Do you always/sometimes/never do homework?

22 or 68.8% said that they always did their English homework, with 10 or 31.3% saying that they did their homework only sometimes. None said that they never do their homework.

D6.2 Do you always/sometimes/never do homework?

As it was for Class B, no respondents said 'never', but 21 (70%) said 'always', and 8 (or 26.7%) said 'sometimes'.

B6.21 Why?

Out of the 22 respondents who said that they always did their homework, about half did it because they wanted to avoid a negative sanction - ie a punishment or a scolding. Their responses are illuminating for they reveal a certain awareness of both their role as students and their teacher's role as teacher. - 'If I don't hand in in time, I will get the habit and it would make (TB) angry.'

For this student it is important that she not get into the habit of not handing in her homework. It is however also important that she not anger her teacher. Another student says that he should not worry his teacher by not doing his work. It appears that by the word 'worry', he means 'annoy' or 'bother'.

3 students do their homework simply because they have to. This suggests that they don't see themselves as having a choice in the matter. 3 others said that they wanted to be good students and homework would allow them to spend more time on their studies. They did it because they 'should be responsible'; because 'it is for our own good. And to make her happy with our class, our class image.' There seems to be a sense of belonging, a responsibility to the larger whole - the class, because perhaps of a certain pride with being part of Class B.

4 others said that homework is done because it is for their own good as it allows them 'to learn and practice', 'to improve my subject'.

Of the 10 who said they do their homework sometimes, 3 said this was because they forgot. But they were aware of the fact that their teacher would not get angry - 'Sometimes I forget to do but she won't be angry'. What is also interesting is that they refer to themselves as being forgetful. And later, some say they are lazy as well.

3 respondents said that they did not have enough time because of too much other homework. One of these openly admitted to copying his classmates' work. - 'It is because sometimes I don't have time to do other homeworks. So I copy at school'.

2 students said they were lazy - 'I have too many homework and was quite lazy', and one said that he didn't do his homework because 'some of the homework are difficult', while another said that when she didn't know how to do her homework, she ask her friends how to.

This is interesting because I wonder if students see doing homework as being so important that if and when they don't know how to do it, they will ask friends, copy their classmates' work etc so that they will be able to hand in work to the teacher. This seems more important than actually doing the work themselves. Might they be ashamed to tell their teacher that they did not do their work because they didn't know how to? Is this behaviour universal?

#### D6.21 Why?

Out of the 21 'always', 9 respondents (or 30%) say they always do their homework so as to avoid punishment.

They are afraid to be scolded by their mother; that their teacher will take away marks (because they have handed in their work late); that they would be sent to detention class or to the principal, etc.

It is illuminating that says 'If not (TD) mines marks.' This suggests that even among this students there is a sense of competition - that there are those who want to score the highest marks possible. Will such behaviour last long, or will it gradually change the more time one has been in Class D?

This may sound a naive question, or a question asked by someone who apparently does not think that students in the tail end class are competitive. It reveals a certain bias, a stereotypical image of students in tail-end classes.

4 students (13.3%) say that they do their homework out of necessity - 'Because it is a must.'; 'It is my job to do it.'

However 4 others (13.3%) said they do their homework because they want to be good students - both for themselves and also for what others would think of them.

- 'It is because I want to study and be clever.'
- 'Because I want to good student and not lazy worker.'
- 'I want to be a good person and I don't want my record dirty.'

- 'Because to show her that I am a obedient boy.'

The last response reveals that the respondent wants to show his teacher that he is an obedient boy. This suggests that he sees being obedient as crucial to being a good student. This is perhaps not a universal opinion, but is interesting because these students care about what others, especially their teacher thinks, about them.

Finally, the remaining 4 say that always they do their homework because homework is good for them as it helps them to improve their English.

Out of the 8 'sometimes', 4 respondents say that this is because they don't know how to do the homework - 'Because some of the homework I don't understand.'

3 others say that sometimes they either forget or are lazy - words used by Class B respondents as well.

One respondent said that whether he did his homework or not depended on his mood - 'See my mood if good I do if bad don't do.'

#### B6.3 Do you get enough English homework?

25 students (or 78.1%) said that they were given enough homework, 5 (15.6%) said that they had too little and 2 (6.3%) said they had too much homework.

#### D6.3 Do you get enough English homework?

The response to this question is interesting because it does not what was expected. I would have thought that this class would not like being given homework - once again a stereotypical view of such a class. Surprisingly, the biggest group -13 (or 43.3%) of the respondents said that they thought that they had too little homework, with 11 others (36.7%) saying that they had enough homework, and only 2 (6.7%) saying that they had too much homework. One might have expected the biggest group to be that which found that they had too much, not too little homework.

## **7. What students like and dislike of their teachers**

#### B7.2 What do you not like about your teacher?

The most popular 'dislike', and by a rather big number as well, was that given by 16 (%) respondents who said that they found their teacher not strict enough. These students find her 'to(o) lenient. She should be a little strict. To shout at the stupid mischief. She is very tolerante too...'. One said that 'she sometimes can't control the class when the class is in havoc', and that 'She should be more alert about pupils not attentive and playing a fool'. 2 of these 16 said that they did not like her because she 'seldom punish us'.

2 other students found her lessons not challenging enough when because '...it is too slow and the test very easy. She should make the test more harder for us'.

In contrast to the above, 2 students said that they don't like their teacher because she is sometimes 'too strict and fierce (fierce)', and when 'She scold me when I don't do my homework or talk in the class'.

2 students said she gave them too much homework, while 2 others said she did the opposite.

3 found their teacher unfair when she sometimes said that Class B could not be compared with (and were not as good as) 1A, her form class.

There were other more miscellaneous comments about her dressing with one respondent saying that she does not like 'the way the clothes she wear, to sexy but actually I don't mind to much but its not good (if I follow our religion)'.

There were comments about the teacher being forgetful, talking as if 'something is in her mouth', and the fact 'she seldom listen, for eg: when any of our classmates raise our hand to talk she will ignore'.

Out of the 3 respondents who answered this question, 4 said that there was nothing about her they did not like.

#### D7.2 What do you not like about your teacher?

In direct contrast to Class B, the most common dislike was that expressed by 13 respondents who said that they did not like their teacher when she was too strict, 'when she is very mean and fierce on me when I didn't do my work' or when she scolded them or gave them offence slips. They did not like he punishing their friends as well.

While no one said they were given too much homework, 2 respondents said they received too little homework.

There were no complaints about the lessons not being challenging enough. However one student said he did not like his teacher because she made them write compositions on Friday, and another complained about having to do book reviews

7 students did not answer this question and from the rest, i.e. out of the 23 who did, 4 said that there was nothing about their teacher they did not like - 'There is nothing that I don't like here. Because she is good to me as I do all the work'. This is about 25 % of all responses.

When we look at both sets of criticisms, it is clear that those by Class B students are not only more in number but also cover a wider range - from the way the teacher (under) controls her class, to the way she teaches, to the way she dresses and speaks.

This puts forward three suggestions. Firstly, the students of Class B are simply more forthcoming with their criticisms, and are more able to articulate them. Secondly, these students may actually have more



to complain about because of their teacher and the way she teaches. Or thirdly, they have more expectations as students, of their teacher, and are more aware of what they should receive from her - how she should teach etc.